

Small-scale Multilingualism of Papua New Guinea: A Southern New Guinean Perspective

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- Thank you to specific members of the Kerake Language Committee: Lawrence Mike, Rachel Midawa, Gima Zoga, Richard Gima, Kawas Säme, Rouda Timoti, Bunai Aniba
- This study was conducted under the auspices of Professor Nicholas Evans's Australian Research Council Laureate Project: The Wellsprings of Linguistic Diversity (Grant No. FL130100111). In the same vein I would like to thank the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language for the additional support I have received.



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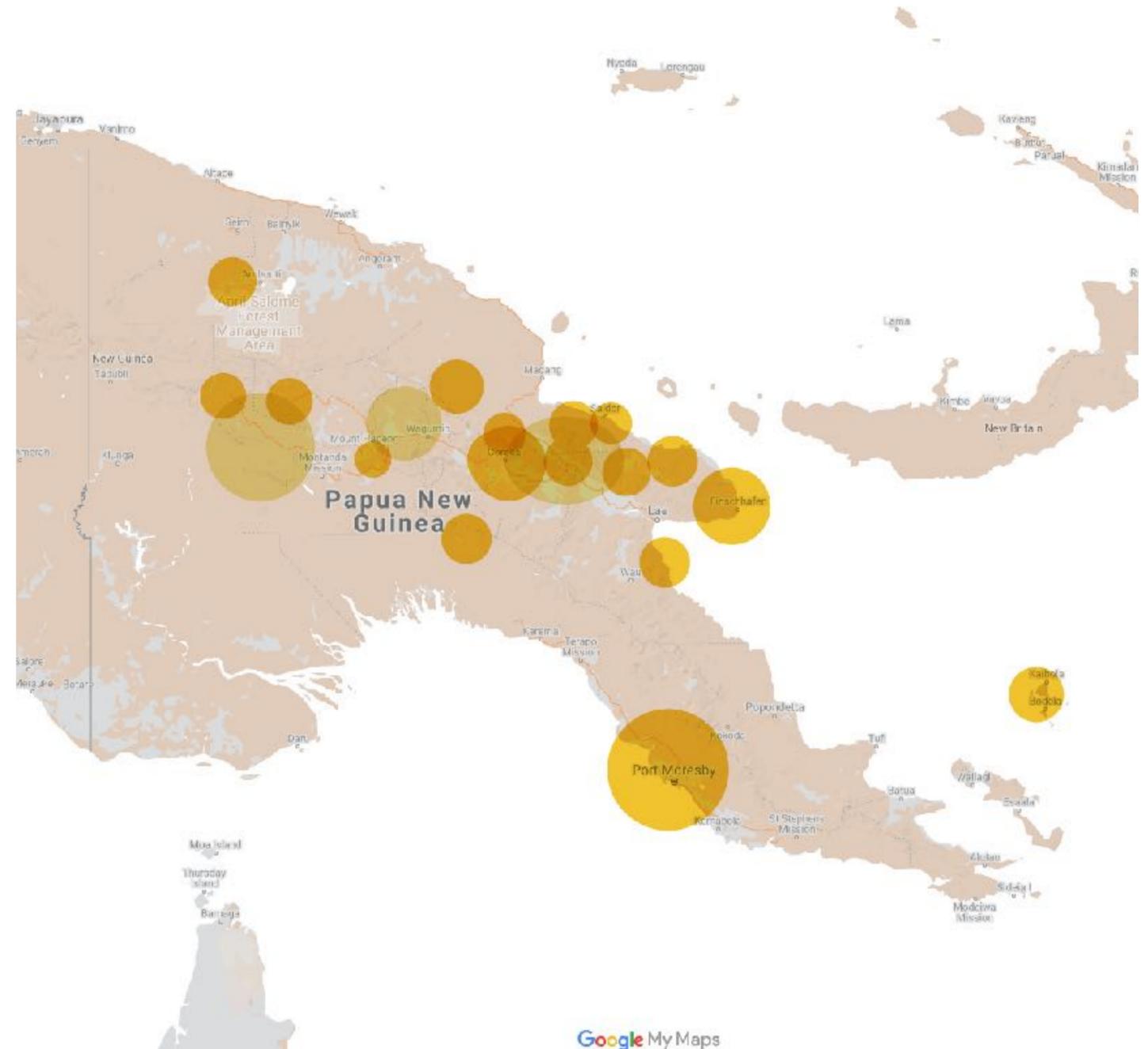
Talk Structure

A present a description of the rural language ecology of the Morehead area of southern Papua New Guinea, and situate it alongside hypotheses made about “small-scale multilingualism” in pre-colonial Papua New Guinea.

1. Pre-colonial Papua New Guinea: What is inferred
2. Language Ecology of Southern New Guinea (Kerake tribe perspective)
 1. Methods
 2. Findings

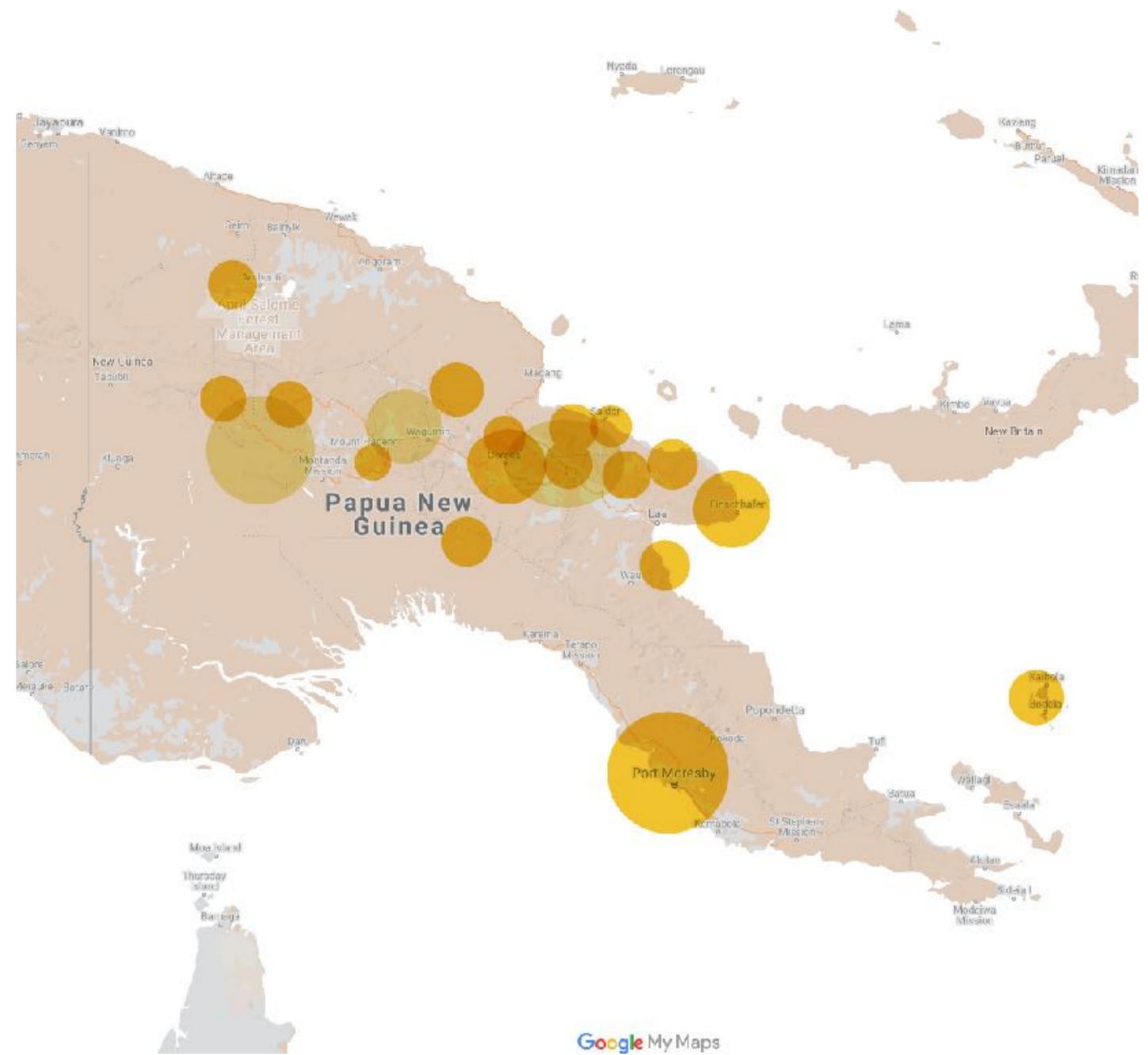
Pre-Colonial Papua New Guinean Language Ecologies: Sankoff's Perspective

- *Language ecology*: “Relationships between languages and their speakers, and language and societal structures, are subject to their social, political and historical contexts” (Blackledge, 2008: 27).
- Sankoff’s reconstruction of pre-colonial societal multilingualism: drawn from qualitative and quantitative data from secondary ethnographic sources from 1950-1970s + own work in Huon Peninsula.
- Quantitative: speaker numbers
- Qualitative: ethnographic reports (e.g. Claassen & McElhanon, 1970, Franklin 1968, Laycock 1965, Salisbury 1962, 1965, Sankoff’s own work with Buang/Mapos)
- Map shows approximate locations of Sankoff’s data sources (sizes of ellipse is visibility and approximate geographic spread, rather than an accurate representation of some parameter such as population size)
- Most of the language communities that are referred to are Trans-New Guinean languages (i.e. Papuan)



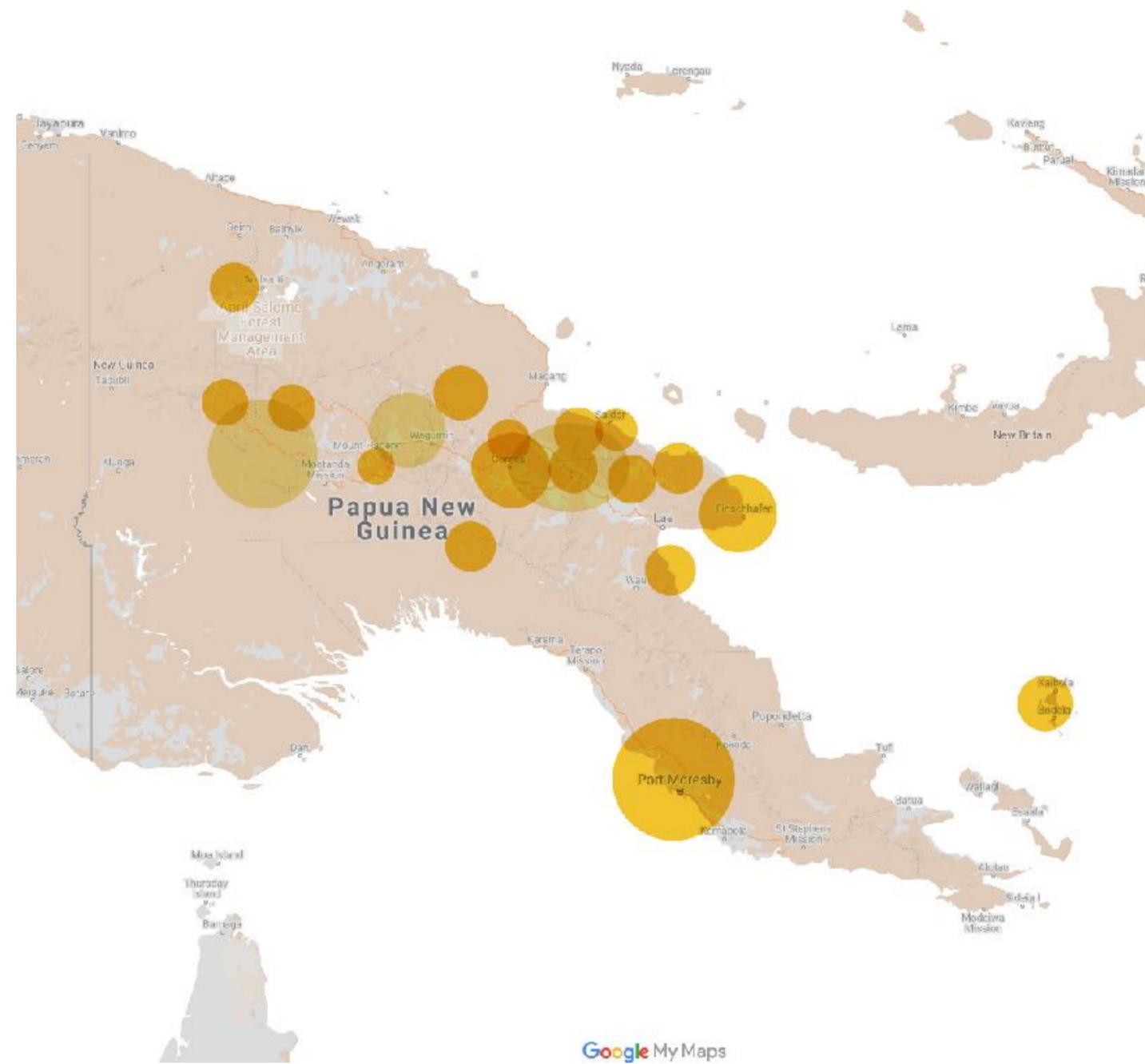
Pre-Colonial Papua New Guinean Language Ecologies: Sankoff's Perspective

- Qualitative characterisations of societal multilingualism differ slightly depending on number of speakers (population size):
 - very small (fewer than 1000 speakers),
 - small (2000 ~ 9,000)
 - mid range (10,000 ~ 25,000)
 - large (30,000+)
- Very small languages are multilingual by necessity. No reported sex differences in multilingual abilities. (East & West Sepik, Madang)
- Of the other languages: “Very roughly, it appears that there has existed a fair amount of bilingualism in border areas and among the smaller or more isolated segments of any linguistic group, but that multilingualism is unlikely in the central areas of large linguistic groups.” (1980a: 104)



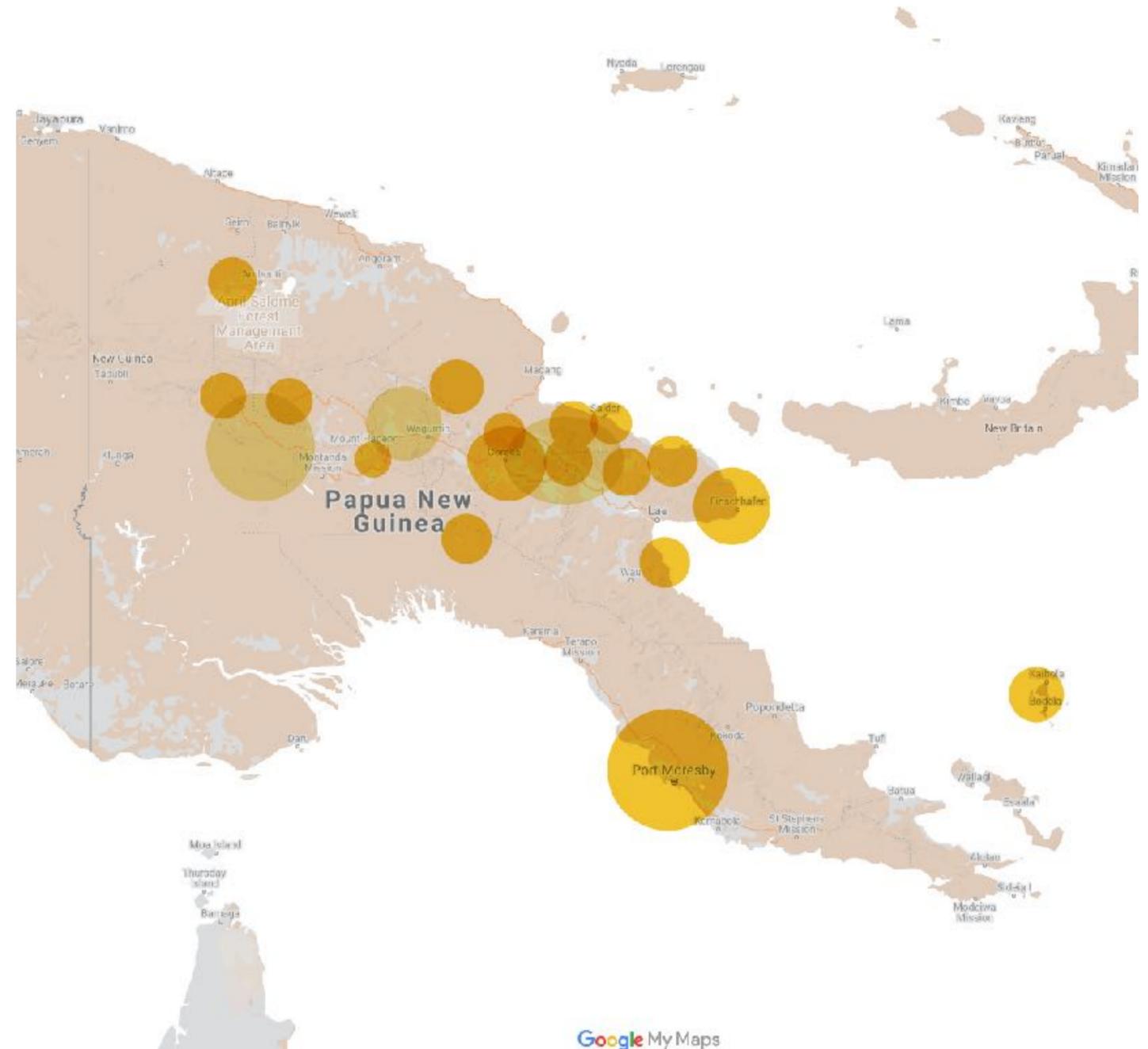
Pre-Colonial Papua New Guinean Language Ecologies: Sankoff's Perspective

- Marriage was a domain of active or passive multilingualism
 - Intermarriage with groups that spoke different languages a “virtual necessity for members of very small language groups” (1980a:100)
 - Marriages occur across language groups, particularly in the border areas of larger languages. “Linguistic differences do not seem to constitute a barrier to intermarriage” (p.107)
- Trade was a domain of active multilingualism
 - Unlike the situation in very small languages, for languages over 1000 speakers there was possibly sex bias in favour of men with respect to bilingualism in the villages visited by traders. (p.103)



Pre-Colonial Papua New Guinean Language Ecologies: Sankoff's Perspective

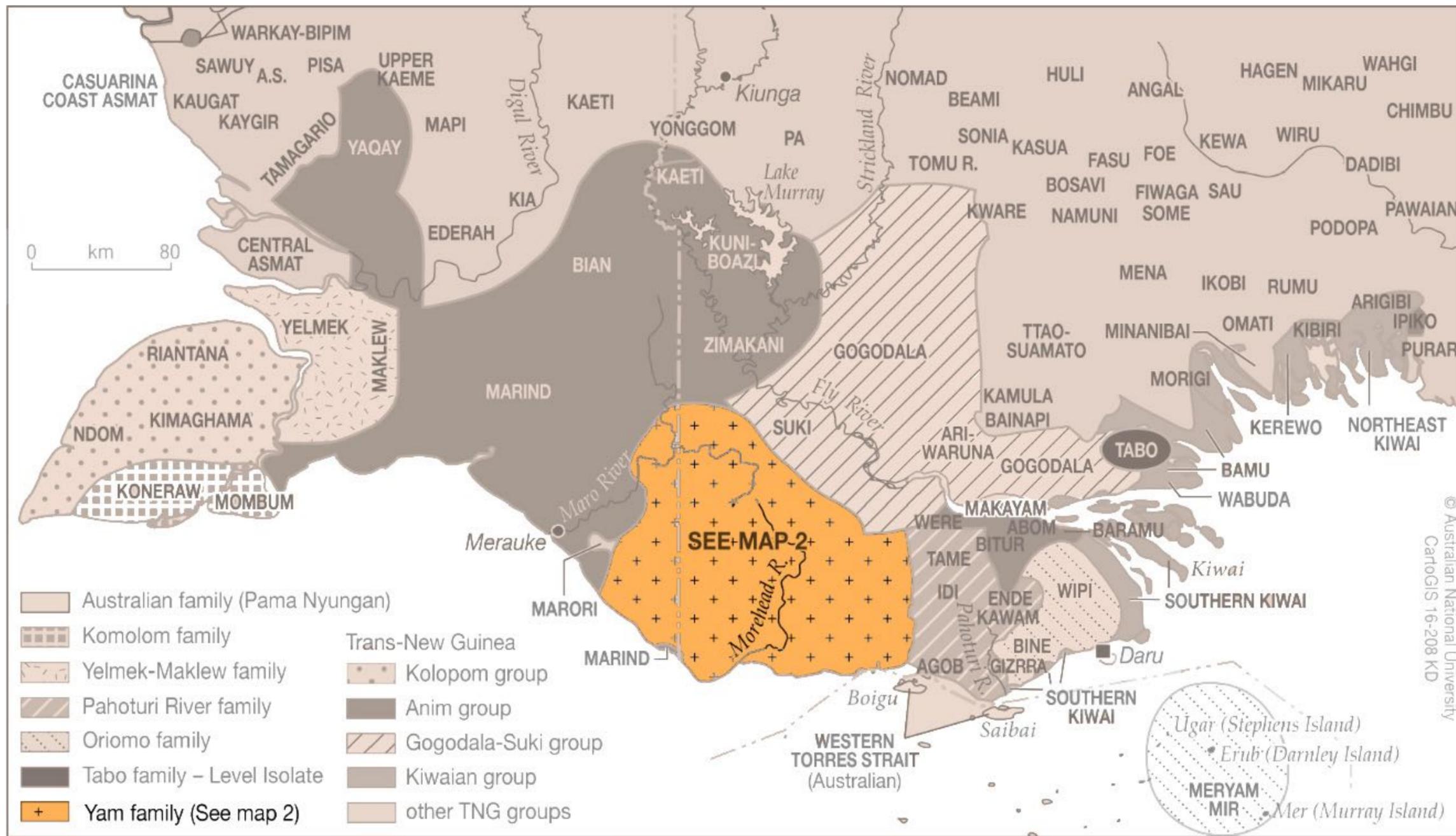
- A lot of passive bilingualism, possibly so because of the dialect chain characteristic of New Guinean languages
- Multilingualism was highly valued (1980b)
 - Siane and Dene (Highlands), Buang/Mapos (Huon Gulf)
- Pride in language/dialect differences
 - Observed many times elsewhere (e.g. Grace 1975), and subsequently (e.g. Thurston 1992, Laycock 1991, Ross 2005)



Summary of Sankoff's Reconstruction

- Pre-colonial New Guinea had high degrees of multilingualism
- Pride in language/dialect differences
- Smaller groups were likely multilingual, larger languages had multilingual border communities with sex differentiations in who was likely a multilingual.
- Language differences not necessarily a barrier to marriage or trade
- Marriage was a domain of active or passive multilingualism
- Trade was a domain of active multilingualism, with use of trade languages being common
- A lot of passive bilingualism, possibly so because of the dialect chain characteristic of New Guinean languages (not necessarily due to multilingualism of an active kind)
- Multilingualism was highly valued
- "...it would appear that the best reconstruction we can make of the precolonial sociolinguistic situation is one in which the basic relationship of language and dialect was a socially symmetric one. Language was viewed as being essentially pragmatic, a means to communicate with natural or supernatural beings, whether local or foreign. People learned and used language as a function of their personal exposure and interest." (*Sankoff 1980a:13*)

Southern New Guinea: Morehead Area



Brief Introduction

- Keraki Tribe as Owners of the Nmbo Language - Moniker of “Nmbo speaker” reflects this.
 - Nmbo: Yam Language, Nambu Branch / namb1293 / ISO 639-3 ncm
 - Tribal dialects:
 - Kerake Nmbo (Nuclear Nmbo)
 - Yarne Nambo (Namna/Nambo)
- Emblematic speakers ≈ 1000
- Total number of speakers ≈ ?2000 - 3000
- Area of low population density: approximately 0.5 persons/km2. (Hitchcock 2010: 75)

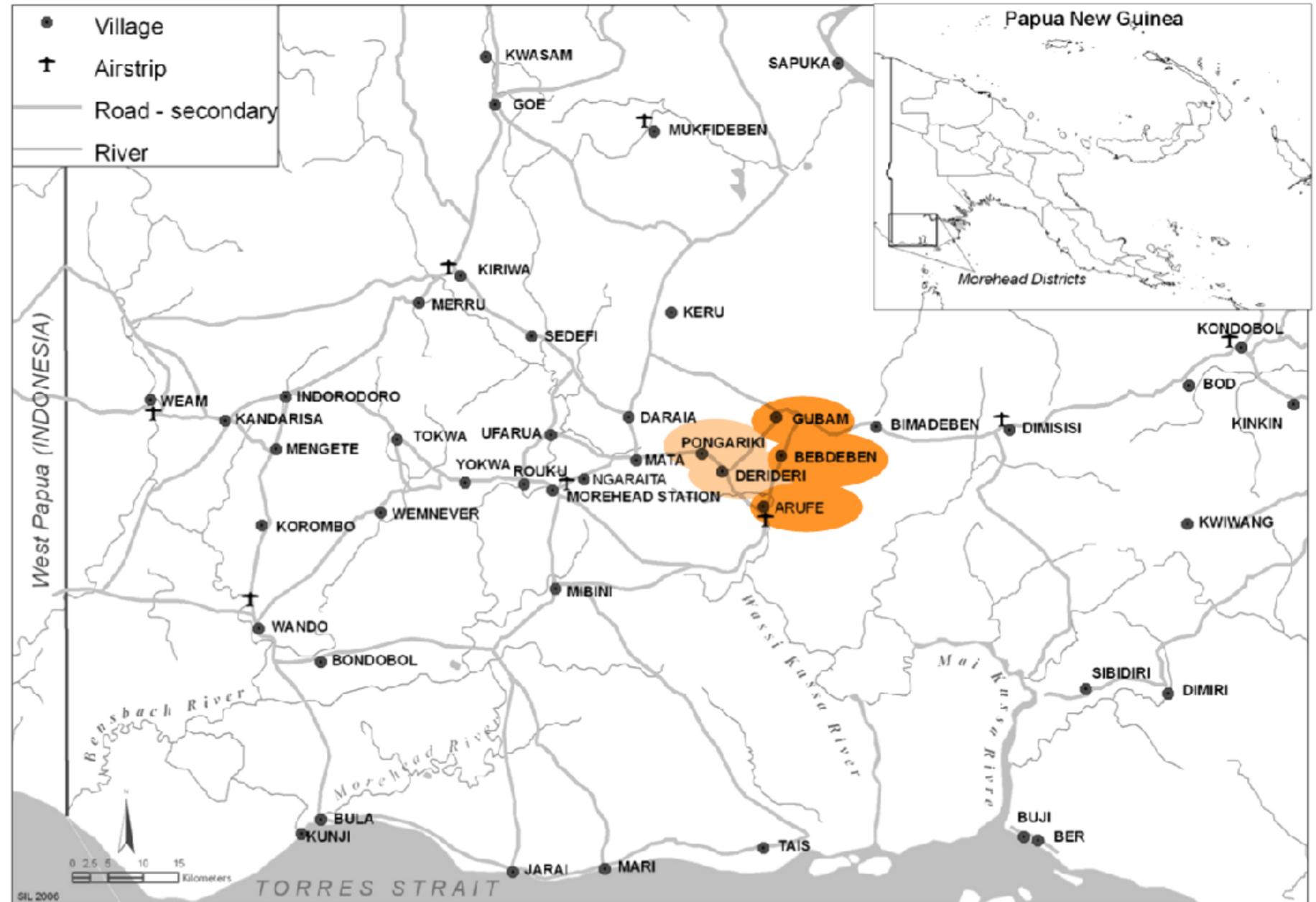


Figure 14. Morehead River area, Papua New Guinea (Pykkonen 2006) (Rueck, 2006:63)

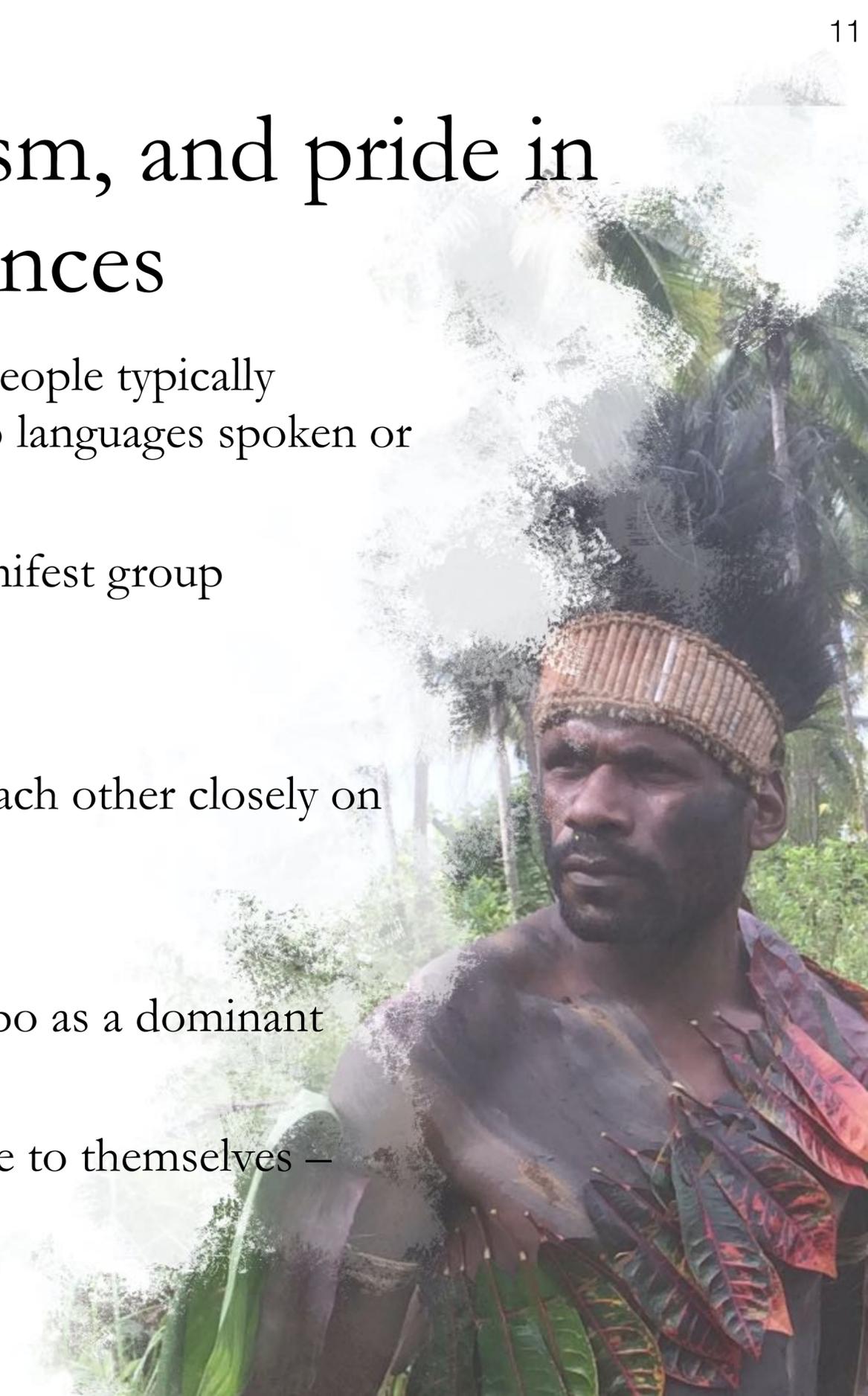
Methods

- Fieldwork of 8 months total between 2014-2017
- Participant observation
- Multilingualism interview
 - 32 speakers
- Pilot study of a perceptual dialectological study (5 speakers)
- Conducted data collection with Kerake Language Committee members (KLC)



Yes: High degrees of multilingualism, and pride in language/dialect differences

- Exact repertoire of individuals is highly dependent on biography, but people typically speak languages of neighbouring locales + mother's language (at least 5 languages spoken or understood)
- “The importance of dialect differences cannot be overstated. They manifest group identity” (Ayres 1983: 330)
 - Lexical and phonological differences highlighted
 - Some evidence that within the speech community speakers follow each other closely on phonological change (Kashima 2020)
- Essentialising of language as a property of Kerake tribe.
- Individuals with complex language biographies who may not have Nmbo as a dominant language still express Nmbo as their language
 - Tribal names reported in Williams are “very rarely used” in reference to themselves – “Kerakia” the one exception. (Ayres 1983: 133)



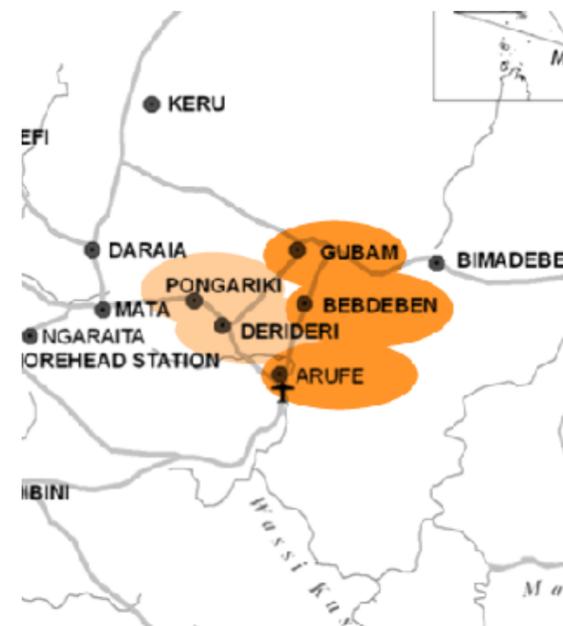
Yes: Marriage as a domain of multilingualism, smaller language communities more multilingual?

- Marriage a major domain, less clear about trade
- Marriages typically occur across villages. The *section* (Williams 1930) system is most important, and there is a strong preference for marrying people outside one's own village of origin.

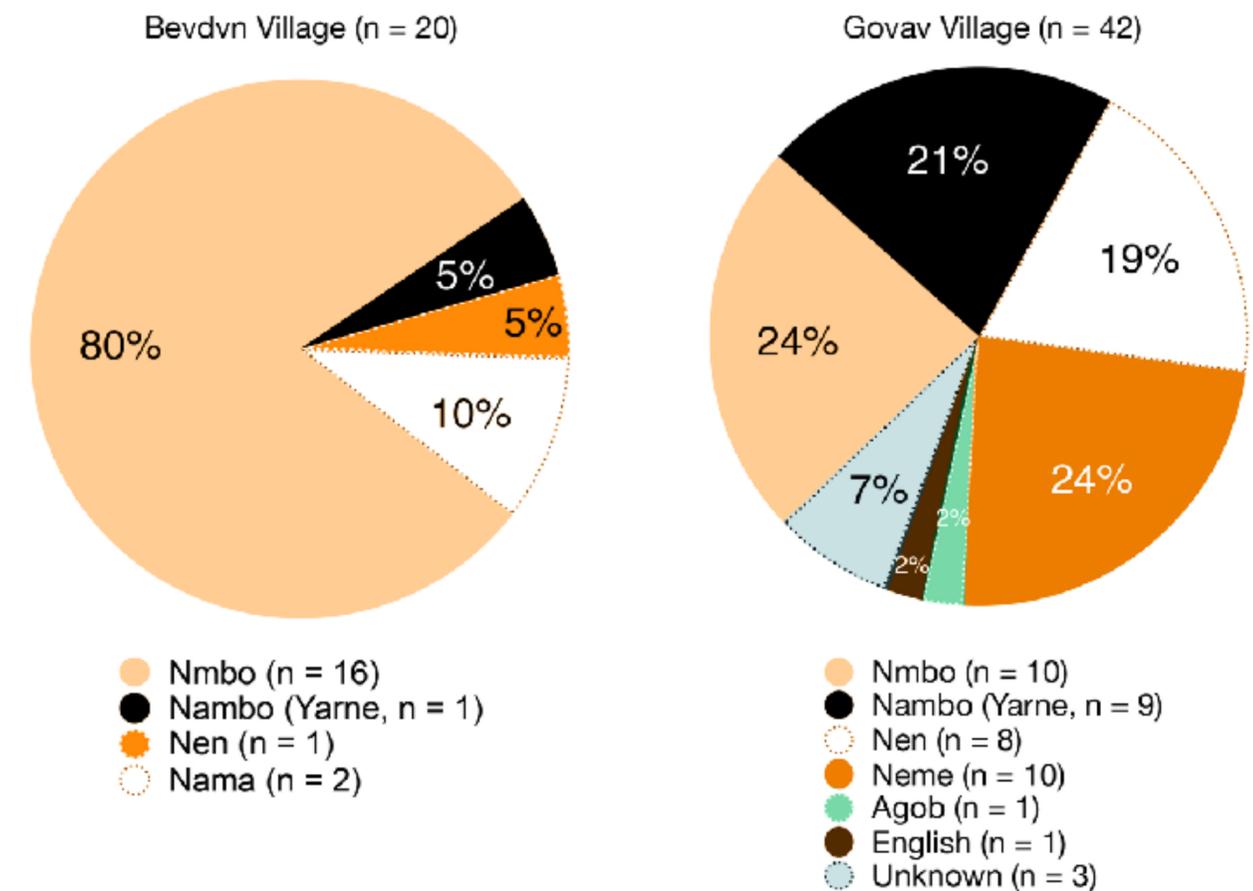
- Given that Nmbo is spoken primarily across three villages, there is a high probability that the spouse of a Nmbo speaker speaks another Nambu branch language

- The Kerake village located in the geographic centre of the three villages has the least multilingual profile (left figure)

- Village of Bimadbn (Nen, 250 speakers) profiles as more multilingual overall.



Proportions of households by primary language affiliations of husband and wife



- Women will continue speaking their language to their children - all adult Kerake who were interviewed say they can speak their mother's language.

Yes: Passive multilingualism and expressions of language abilities

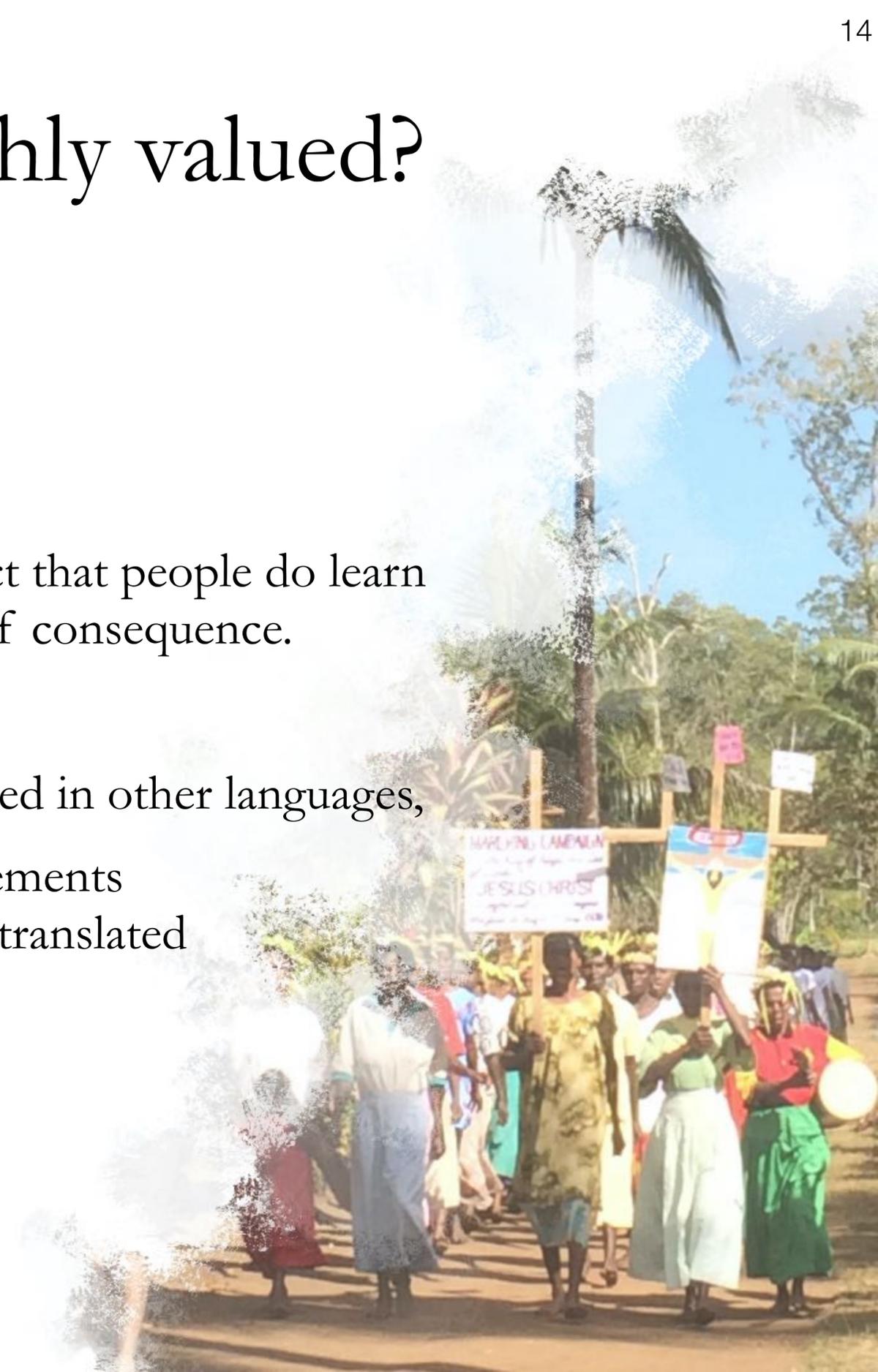
Sankoff: ““The Buang device for measuring differences of degree was the length of time a person from one's home village would need to stay in village X in order to be able to “hear” (i.e., understand) the speech variety spoken there. This model was applied to speech varieties within their own language family. For unrelated languages, this model was not applied, they being regarded as qualitatively different.” (1980: 114)

Impressionistically speaking, Nmbo speakers who used *dodo fivi* ‘I am truly ignorant’ and *mavña wm* ‘I don’t know’ when talking about non-Nambu branch languages

	Nmbo	English Translation
Production: high	<i>Ynd nowavtan</i>	‘I speak it’
	<i>Mwyat wm.</i>	‘I know.’
Production: ?simple	<i>Yao tombae fivi</i>	‘Not long words.’
	<i>Ofae zigotro</i>	‘Only easy words.’
	<i>Nngangotan.</i>	‘I can reply.’
Production: ?low	<i>Yao nowavtan tkrat zigot</i>	‘I can’t speak hard words.’
Comprehension only	<i>Ynd näyāretan.</i>	I can hear it.’
Non-comprehension	<i>Mavña wm</i>	‘I don’t know.’
	<i>Dodo fivi wm.</i>	‘I am truly ignorant.’

Yes?: Multilingualism as highly valued?

- No explicit statements of positive valuation were made, but the fact that people do learn languages even later in life suggests there is no negative valuation of consequence.
 - Assisted learning through community members.
- Church services typically in Nmbu, but translations sometimes offered in other languages,
- Church affiliated events like fellowships also tend to make announcements and sermons in the speaker's emblematic language, but occasionally translated into another language the speaker is capable of

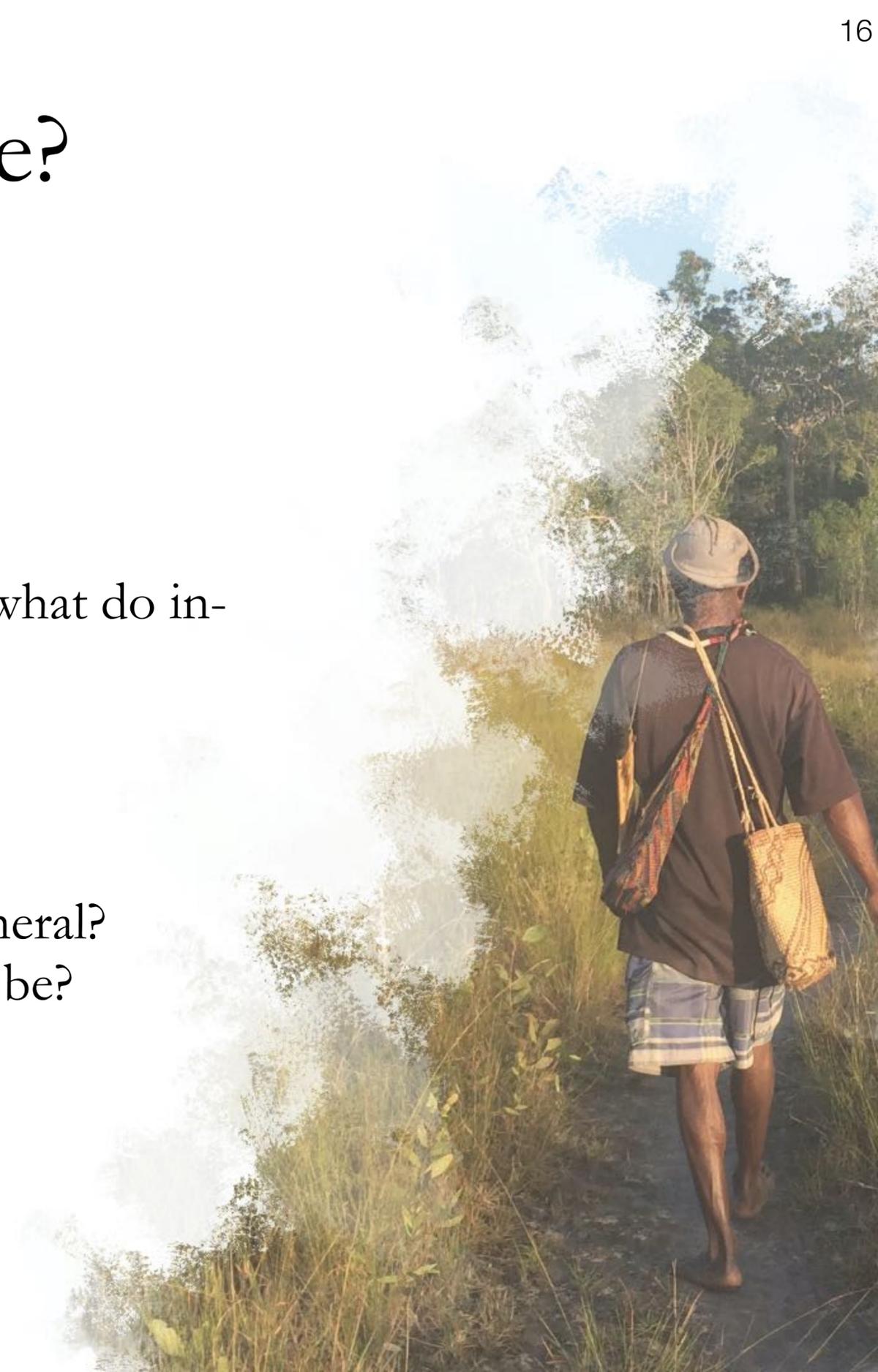


Comparison against Sankoff's Reconstruction

- Pride in language/dialect differences - **YES**
 - Language is viewed as the property of the Kerake.
- Smaller groups were likely multilingual, larger languages had multilingual border communities (**YES**) with sex differentiations in who was likely a multilingual (NO)
- Marriage was a domain of active or passive multilingualism - **YES** (active, not passive)
- Language differences not necessarily a barrier to marriage or trade. - **YES** (with a caveats, no data on trade)
- A lot of passive bilingualism, possibly so because of the dialect chain characteristic of New Guinean languages (not necessarily due to learned multilingualism) - **YES** (with a caveat)
- Multilingualism was highly valued - **YES** (with a caveat)

Where to from here?

- Enrich this first picture
 - This report is from a Kerake perspective in Kerake places - what do in-marrying non-Kerake think?
 - Do people do as they say?
- Sociolinguistic Typology
 - While Sankoff's description seems to hold true, is it too general? How different can areal/regional multilingual characteristics be? Is it possible to compare across contexts, and if so, how?



Acknowledgements



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Abstract

In this talk I will present a description of the rural language ecology of the Morehead area of southern Papua New Guinea, and situate it alongside hypotheses made about “small-scale multilingualism” in pre-colonial Papua New Guinea. The language situation in pre-colonial New Guinea is thought to have been highly multilingual (Sankoff 1980a; Laycock 1979), in part as a necessity of communication between adjoining communities of low speaker numbers (Sankoff 1980b; Ferree 2000; Foley 2000). These views are ostensibly supported by the few descriptions we have of rural Papuan multilingualism from the middle of the twentieth century (e.g. by Salisbury 1962). Fieldwork based descriptions have, however, become rarer as modernisation erodes these rural language ecologies.

The southern area of Papua New Guinea has managed to retain many aspects of its pre-colonial language ecology due to the relatively recent presence of colonial influence (Knauff 1993; Evans 2012). To this day Morehead is remote from the administrative centre, and only now are some speakers gradually incorporating Tok Pisin into their linguistic repertoires. This makes the Morehead area one of the few places on earth where we can still somewhat study the dynamics of a pre-colonial New Guinea. The data in this talk concerns various aspects of the multilingual language ecology of the Morehead area, and is based on my own fieldwork as well as those from colleagues who have worked in the area. Data will include contemporary demographics, qualitative description of multilingual households and speaker repertoires, and emic ideologies and ways of speaking about multilingualism. This talk presents data that are emerging from an under described part of the world, which goes towards representing New Guinea as another point of comparison to other better-described areas of small-scale and rural multilingualism, such as South America (Chernela 2013, Campbell and Grondona 2010), and Africa (e.g. Di Carlo, Good, and Diba 2020, Lüpke and Storch 2013, Lüpke 2018).