

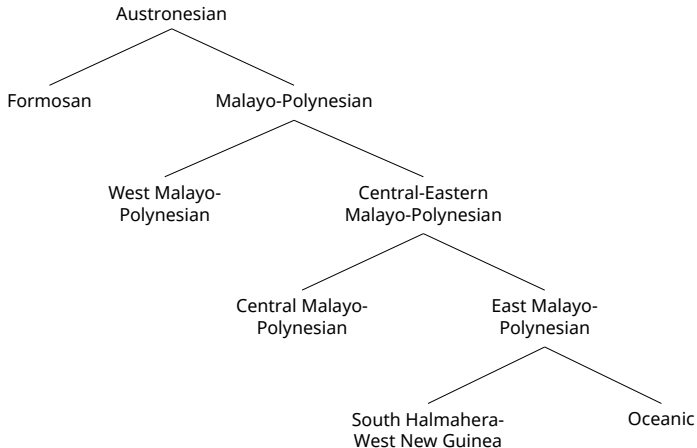
# Challenges in survey work with a moribund language

Swarthmore College  
LING 075. Field Methods

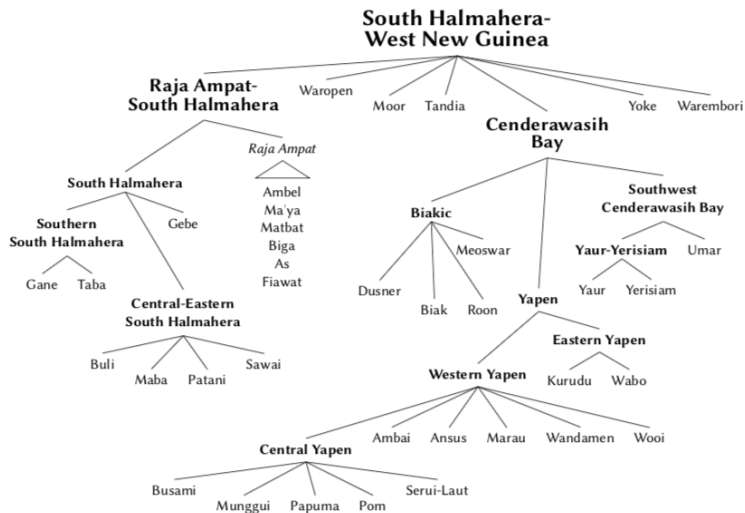
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23 March 2020

'Synchronic and diachronic investigations in RASH, a little-known subbranch of Austronesian'



'Synchronic and diachronic investigations in RASH, a little-known subbranch of Austronesian'



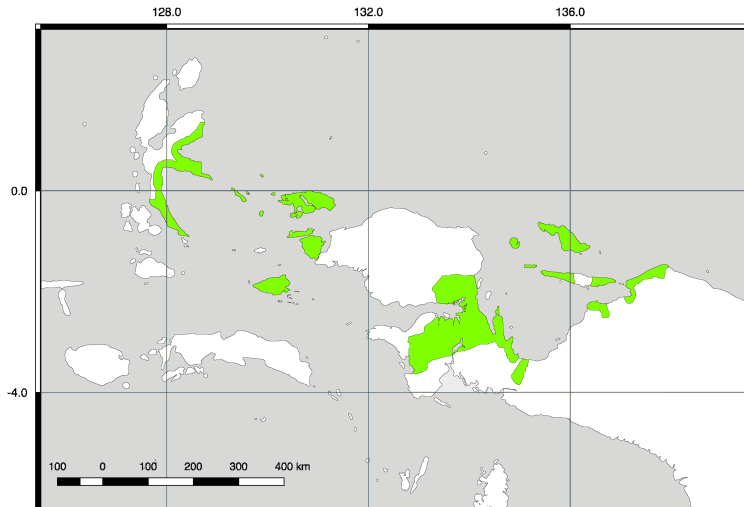
After Kamholz (2014)

'Synchronic and diachronic investigations in RASH, a little-known subbranch of Austronesian'





# 'Synchronic and diachronic investigations in RASH, a little-known subbranch of Austronesian'



‘Synchronic and diachronic investigations in RASH, a little-known subbranch of Austronesian’

<b>Raja Ampat</b>	<b>South Halmahera</b>
Ambel	Buli
<b>As</b>	Gane
<b>Batta</b>	Gebe
<b>Biga</b>	Maba
Matbat	Patani
Ma'ya	Sawai
<b>Salawati varieties</b>	Taba

## 'Synchronic and diachronic investigations in RASH, a little-known subbranch of Austronesian'

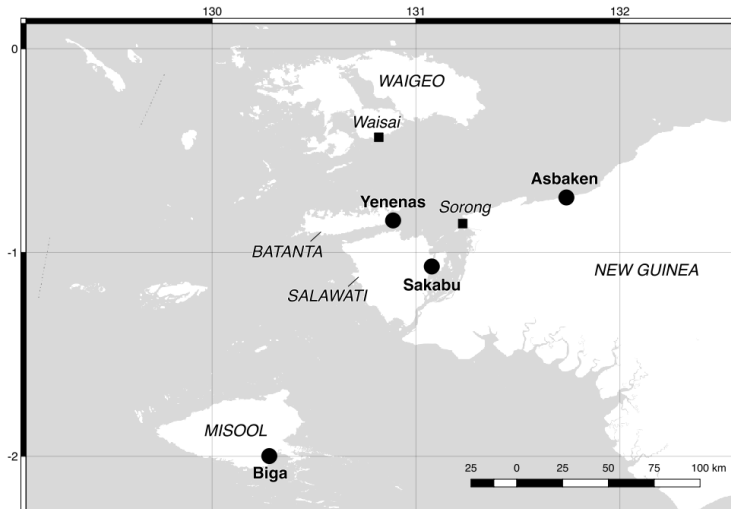
- ▶ Aims of project:

1. Phonological analyses of the word-prosodic systems
2. Phonetic investigations into the fundamental frequency of vowels
3. Subclassification of RASH and reconstruction of proto-RASH

- ▶ Survey trip: lexical, morphological, syntactic data

- ▶ List of 200 words, 6 speakers -- phonetic and phonological analysis
- ▶ Morphological paradigms (possessive and verbal subject marking)
- ▶ 'Conversational questionnaires' (François 2019)

# 'Synchronic and diachronic investigations in RASH, a little-known subbranch of Austronesian'



## The language situation of Asbaken

- ▶ As (asz) (Austronesian; SHWNG > RASH):
  - ▶ Berry & Berry (1987): approx. 300 speakers in Asbaken, Mega, and Malaumkarta
  - ▶ EGIDS 6b
  - ▶ Wordlists
  - ▶ Muslim
- ▶ Moi (mxn) (Papuan; West Bird's Head):
  - ▶ Approx. 4600 speakers
  - ▶ EGIDS 6b
  - ▶ Grammatical sketch, analytic papers, and an extensive vocabulary list (Stokhof & Flassy 1985; Menick 1995, 1996, 2000)
  - ▶ Christian

## The challenges

- ▶ Finding contacts for Asbaken
- ▶ (Getting to Asbaken)
- ▶ Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work
- ▶ Recording conditions

## Finding contacts for Asbaken



(Getting to Asbaken)





(Getting to Asbaken)



## (Getting to Asbaken)



(Getting to Asbaken)



## (Getting to Asbaken)



## Finding speakers of As



## Finding speakers of As



## Finding speakers of As





## Finding speakers of As





## Finding speakers of As



## Finding speakers of As



## Finding speakers of As



## Finding speakers of As



Play

## Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work

- ▶ **Jamila Kapitan** (F, 1962)
- ▶ Jabida Kapitan (F, 1951)
- ▶ Hamid Mayor (M, 1959)

## Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work

LA        Okay... so let's try [the words] from the other day again  
What... what were [the words] you said earlier?

JamK     It's only... um, our parents only taught us several [words]  
like 'knife', 'machete', 'bird', that's all  
There isn't anything else

LA        The other [words] aren't necessary

JamK     The other [words] aren't necessary, we don't know them  
anymore, xx forgotten them  
Our parents didn't tell us, only those [words]

## Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work

LA Umm... so yeah, what's 'knife'?

JamK [siŋke]

They only wanted to tell us that, and 'machete'

LA Uh huh, what's the word for 'machete'?

JamK ...and 'sago', and -- what's it called? -- 'bird', that's all, that's all they taught us

They didn't teach us anything more, so we no longer know [our language], we... yes, now we're confused

LA So what's the word for 'machete'...?

JamK These [four words], these ones that are easy, we know them  
'Machete' is [siŋka]

## Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work

*Later...*

LA Um, I'm only asking, but... do you know any stories in As, or folktales in As?

JamK No, no, not at all, they didn't tell stories

LA Not at all...

Uh huh, everything's already.... already gone

JamK They didn't tell xx these words, it's gone, we're angry because of that

...

The head of the regency asked as well, it was just the same as what I'm saying to you

'Knife', 'machete', 'sago', I gave them all

...



## Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work

- JamK I stood up then, when this was finished, then [I said]  
'lenwobok', that means 'good morning' in Moi  
Ah, after that, it was just the same as what you're asking in  
As and Moi xx  
I first [said the four words] in my language, first, aah then I  
gave them in Moi  
They were amazed by that: 'This woman is very fluent in Moi'  
That was at the beginning, what [I said] earlier, up to '10'  
They said: 'Oh, this woman is indeed fluent in Moi'
- LA Fluent... but what about As...?

## Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work

JamK It's the same as this, there aren't any [words] other than those [I gave earlier] anymore

My mother's generation didn't tell us

They died, they didn't tell us children [the words]

They should have told us children so that it can be like this, we continue [speaking]

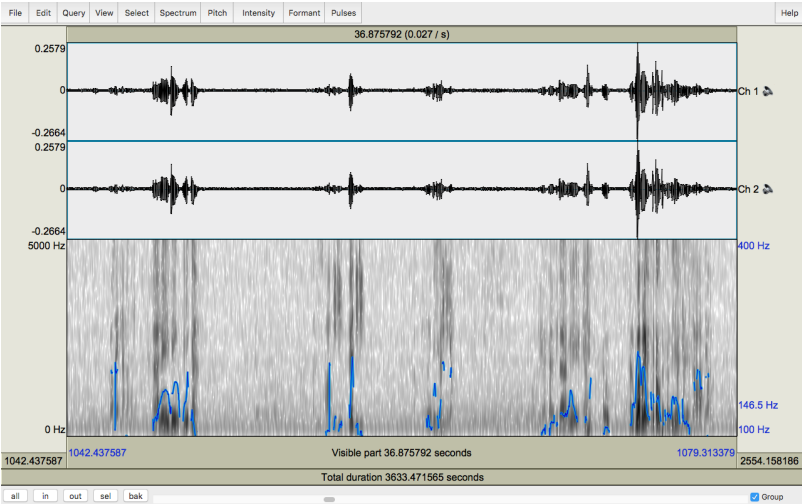
## Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work

- ▶ Jamila Kapitan (F, 1962)
- ▶ **Jabida Kapitan** (F, 1951)
- ▶ **Hamid Mayor** (M, 1959)

Finding speakers of As ...who were willing and able to work



# Recording conditions



Play

# Successes!

- ▶ 🎉 Data! 🎉
  - ▶ Updated vitality assessment: EGIDS 9
- ▶ Inspired interest in younger generations
- ▶ Brought to the attention of others in Asbaken
  - ▶ As exists!
  - ▶ Issues to do with language vitality and endangerment

## Not-so-successes

- ▶ Poor-quality recordings
  - ▶ Can't be used for phonetic analysis
- ▶ Questionable quality of linguistic data
  - ▶ One speaker, a lot of variation
  - ▶ How useful for phonological and historical work?
- ▶ Contributing factors:
  - ▶ Moribund status
  - ▶ **Time pressure**
  - ▶ **My own lack of forthrightness**
  - ▶ **My own impatience**

## Looking forward...

- ▶ Use the data best I can in the project
- ▶ Return to Asbaken, now that I have contacts
- ▶ Work with more speakers
  - ▶ 'Softly, softly' with JamK and JabK
  - ▶ Plus two more??
- ▶ Community dictionary



Thank you!

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