The Acquisition of Other People's Languages: A View from Arapesh Country
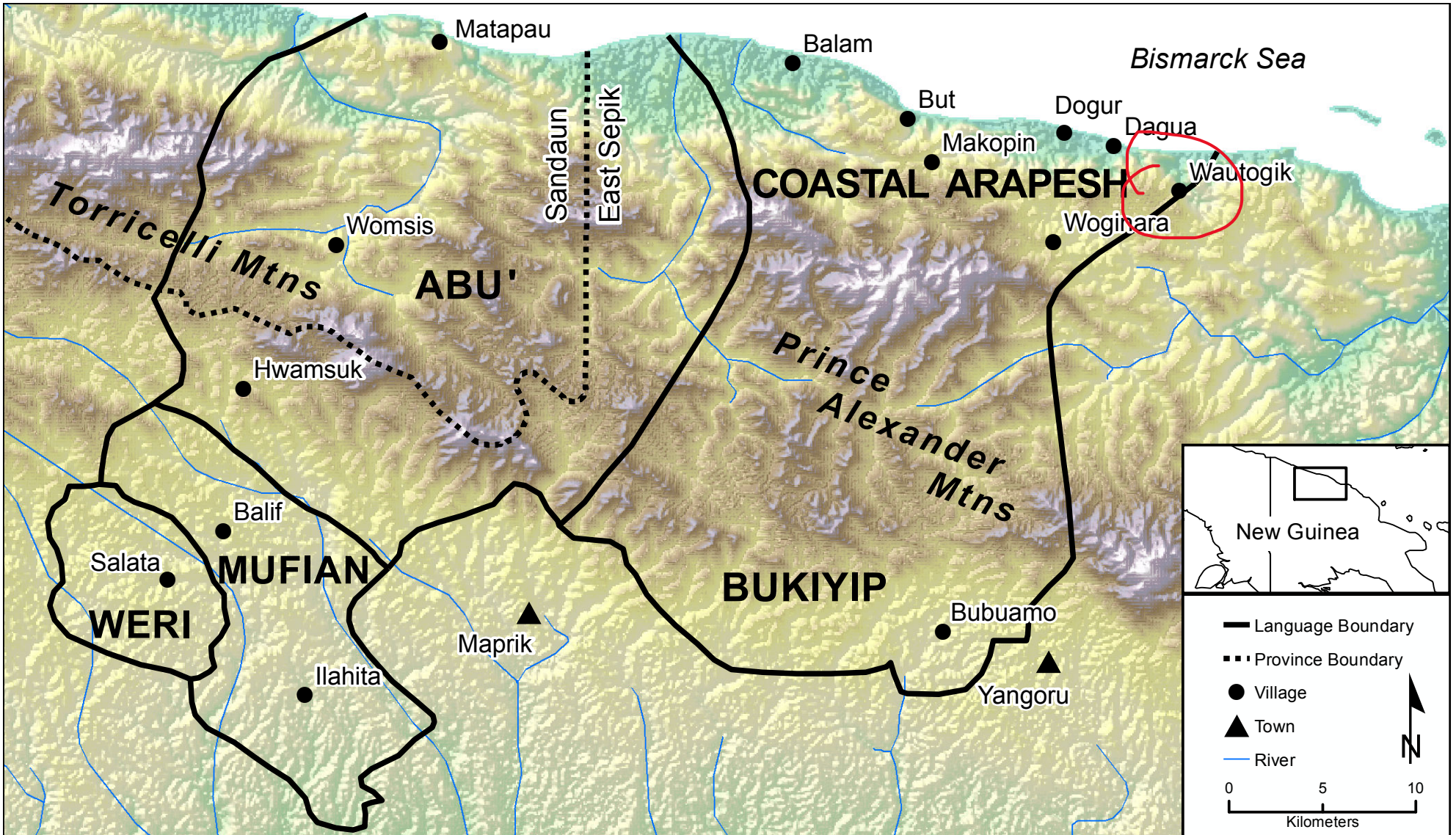
Lise M. Dobrin
University of Virginia, USA

LSPNG 2021

Lise, ruahaep! 'good morning'

Grid | Text | Subtitles | Lexicon | Comments | Recognizers | Metadata | Controls

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Selection: 00:00:16.630 - 00:00:23.580 6950

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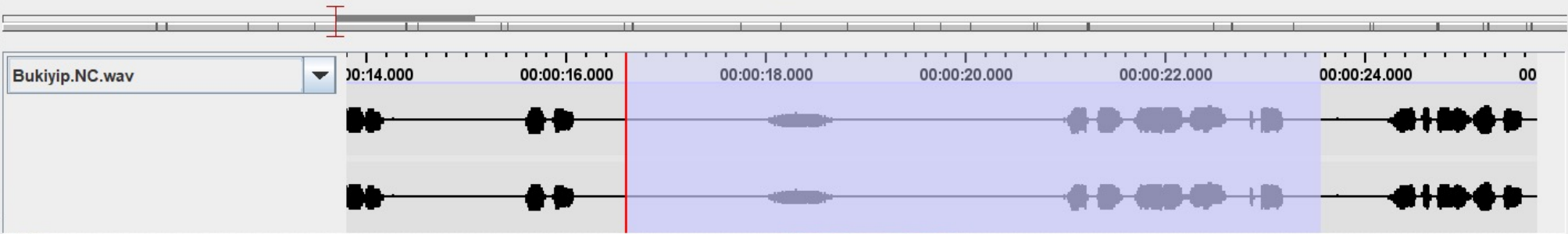
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Conrad_transcription   WE | WILPAT.   YEK-INY MOUL YOPWI-NY.   YOPU-TALI WI

Dobrin_transcription   jweh wilpat.   Ah yek-i-ny mouɨ ny-i-ne stret.   Yopu-t-ali w

Dobrin_gloss   he wall of) the house.   My work is good.   It is a good h

File Edit Annotation Tier Type Search View Options

Grid   Text   Subti

▼ Peilug

> | Nr | Annotation
41 Kw-a-kih-i tik tik tik tik tik tik k-o-nak k-o-ule-mu a, kw-a-tik-imu omom h-a-i
42 Iwe mamak, iwe mamak, Enyi-dak monek-eny? Enyi-dak monek-eny?
43 Okok dokwechik k-o-ne-ne-moli unalukw.
44 K-o-nak kw-a-glik, k-o-nak kw-a-glik wotak chopuk kw-a-kih-i.
45 Bwi-yeh.
46 Kw-a-kih-i bwi-yeh k-o-nak-i, kw-a-kih-i, k-o-nak k-o-wache-nyi buwany ga
47 Iwe mamak, iwe mamak, monek-eny enyi-dak? Monek-eny enyi-dak?
48 Orait
49 k-o-nak-i
50 K-o-nak kw-a-tik kw-e-yany k-o-wechik-eny kobwi ch-i-k-eny-ik wotak a əl
51 >Kw-a-tagla-li ch-a-pwe ch-o-wak echi-dak, k-o-nak kw-a-tal ən-eny cholk
52 Kw-a-tal cholkowi.
53 Orait
54 k-o-nak kw-ə-nyi-bik ny-a-kis,
55 orait
56 kw-a-pwe kw-a-klip-om, kw-a-kli yowi, p-i-minek bolany.
57 Orait h-a-nak h-a-nak h-a-pwe.
58 Kw-a-klip-om Kədak n-i-nak-i anini n-o-lik-epa-mu yek-imu, əh p-i-klip-oni
59 K-o-nak yawihas wotak k-u-nak-i e. Deke p-i-klip-ani k-o-nak-i ali k-o-nek
60 Əke n-e-pi.
61 P-u-bwechik-im-oni bolany.
62 Apap s-apə-dak, cholkowi.
63 Y-a-tal-əp y-a-pi-bik.
64 Wilih bahi, buwany nyanyi y-a-pit-eny y-e-ny-emu qani

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'orait' instead of əriə

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1 Orait unalukw   00:00:00.740 00:00:03.380 00:00:02.64
2 Orait   00:00:24.900 00:00:26.090 00:00:01.19
3 Orait ənan n-   00:00:45.730 00:00:49.370 00:00:03.64
4 Orait kw-a-til-   00:00:54.260 00:00:57.510 00:00:03.25
5 Orait k-o-nak   00:00:58.210 00:00:59.450 00:00:01.24
6 Orait n-a-kli   00:01:11.370 00:01:16.000 00:00:04.63
7 Orait ch-a-   00:01:16.630 00:01:20.170 00:00:03.54
8 Orait   00:01:30.810 00:01:31.820 00:00:01.01
9 orait,   00:01:36.760 00:01:37.570 00:00:00.81
10 orait   00:01:46.950 00:01:48.170 00:00:01.22
11 Orait   00:02:09.490 00:02:10.490 00:00:01.00
12 Orait ənan n-   00:02:32.590 00:02:36.990 00:00:04.40
13 Orait   00:02:50.420 00:02:52.420 00:00:02.00
14 Orait   00:03:46.880 00:03:47.80 00:02:36.990
15 Orait   00:04:13.210 00:04:14.200 00:00:00.99
16 orait   00:04:20.200 00:04:20.990 00:00:00.79
17 Orait h-a-nak   00:04:25.060 00:04:27.090 00:00:02.03

39 occurrences in 39 annotati...   Search   Close   Search complete

Foley, William 2017. **The language of the Sepik-Ramu Basin and environs.** In Bill Palmer (ed.), *The Languages and Linguistics of the New Guinea Area: A comprehensive guide*, 197-431. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

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Language and ethnobiological skills decline precipitously in Papua New Guinea, the world's most linguistically diverse nation

Alfred Kik[a,b,c,1], Martin Adamec[d], Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald[e], Jarmila Bajzekova[a,c], Nigel Baro[f,g], Claire Bowern[h], Robert K. Colwell[i,j], Pavel Drozd[d], Pavel Duda[a], Sentiko Ibalim[a,c,f], Leonardo R. Jorge[c], Jane Mogina[k], Ben Ruli[f], Katerina Sam[a,c], Hannah Sarvasy[l], Simon Saulei[g], George D. Weiblen[m], Jan Zrzavy[a], and Vojtech Novotny[a,c,1]

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Papua New Guinea is home to >10% of the world's languages and rich and varied biocultural knowledge, but the future of this diversity remains unclear. We measured language skills of 6,190 students speaking 392 languages (5.5% of the global total) and modeled their future trends using individual-level variables characterizing family language use, socioeconomic conditions, students' skills, and language traits. This approach showed that only 58% of the students, compared to 91% of their parents, were fluent in indigenous languages, while the trends in key drivers of language skills (language use at home, proportion of mixed-language families, urbanization, students' traditional skills) predicted accelerating decline of fluency to an estimated 26% in the next generation of students. Ethnobiological knowledge declined in close parallel with language skills. Varied medicinal plant uses known to the students speaking indigenous languages are replaced by a few, mostly nonnative species for the students speaking English or Tok Pisin, the national lingua franca. Most (88%) students want to teach indigenous language to their children. While crucial for keeping languages alive, this intention faces powerful external pressures as key factors (education, cash economy, road networks, and urbanization) associated with language attrition are valued in contemporary society.

individual speakers, to predict future trends in a global hotspot of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the world's most linguistically diverse nation, where ~9 million people speak ~840 languages (5, 13). PNG's languages are highly diverse, classified into at least 33 families (14). Until recently, these languages enjoyed widespread vitality due to the absence of a dominant language in the region, stable small-scale multilingualism (15), and focus on language as a marker of group identity (7, 16). New Guinea is also the world's most floristically diverse island (17), comprising ~5% of the world's biodiversity (18). Throughout PNG, numerous indigenous communities have explored, systematized, used, and managed the extraordinary biodiversity in their natural environment, thus generating extensive biocultural knowledge of local ecosystems (19–21). The traditional

ANTHROPOLOGY

Significance

Around the world, more than 7,000 languages are spoken, most of them by small populations of speakers in the tropics. Globalization puts small languages at a disadvantage, but our understanding of the drivers and rate of language loss remains

The symbolic realm that structures New Guinea language shift:

Kulick, Don. 1992. *Language shift and cultural reproduction: Socialization, self, and syncretism in a Papua New Guinean village*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dobrin, Lise M. 2014. Language Shift in an 'Importing Culture': The Cultural Logic of the Arapesh Roads. In Peter K. Austin and Julia Sallabank (eds.), *Endangered Languages: Beliefs and Ideologies in Language Documentation and Revitalization*, 125–148. (Proceedings of the British Academy 199.) London: Oxford University Press.

Dobrin, Lise M. and Mark Sicoli. 2018. Why Cultural Meanings Matter in Endangered Language Research. In Bradley McDonnell, Andrea L. Berez-Kroeker & Gary Holton (eds.), *Reflections on Language Documentation 20 Years after Himmelmann 1998,* 41–54. (Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication No. 15)

Slotta, James. 2020. Endangered languages and porous selves. Comment on Kulick, 2019, *A death in the rainforest: How a language and a way of life came to an end in Papua New Guinea. HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10(2): 650–655.

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What even *are* languages in PNG?

"Socially, the Kewa language does not represent any political or national group. In fact, many speakers from separate dialects will deny that they speak the same language." (Franklin 1968:1)

"[A]mong the Mountain Arapesh, the people of Alitoa considered that the shift from an /l/ to an /r/ was sufficient to distinguish them from the people of Liwo, their near neighbors. In contrast, Polynesians, separated by hundreds of miles and different historical experiences, consider a similar shift from *fale* (Samoan for house) to *fare* (Tahitian for house) to be proof that they are one people." (Mead 1938:158)

"It is rare for speakers of Papuan languages to have a name for themselves, in their own language, as a linguistic unit; rather they will use a word which simply means 'the people', in an ethnocentric sense, and this term may be much narrower in its extent than the linguistic group." (Laycock and Voorhoeve 1971:509)

"A look at *Ethnologue* reveals that many languages have been named several times by different people and that there is at least some confusion among those who count the languages of PNG as to whether two names should stand for one, two or more languages." As a result, "it is often not clear what languages particular forms of speech are dialects of" (Mühlhäusler 2006:29, 33)

Are There Social Groups in the New Guinea Highlands?

Roy Wagner

The study of man's social arrangements—his relationships with his fellow man and how he conceives of those relationships—has traditionally been the province of cultural anthropology. This does not mean that social relationships and what people think of them are not important to archeology and physical anthropology. It simply means that society and social relationships, rather than man's physical constitution or the record of his development through time, are a part of the basic subject matter of cultural anthropology.

Cultural anthropology is almost as large and vaguely defined as anthropology in general. Since cultural anthropology can and does include studies of everything from poetry to plowing fields, anthropologists have often distinguished the study of social arrangements as social anthropology, a particular subfield of cultural anthropology. This designation tends to be misleading, for it suggests that the difference between social anthropology and the other aspects of cultural anthropology is mainly one of subject matter. In fact this is not so. Traditional social anthropology is based on some very special assumptions about the importance of society —assumptions that are not necessarily shared by other cultural anthropologists—and it contains a large body of theory developed on those assumptions. What those assumptions are and whether we are justified in separating the study of society from the rest of cultural anthropology is the subject of this chapter. In order to answer it, however, we shall have to turn from this ambiguous and confusing realm of definitions and examine the historical development of the concepts involved. After all, the only excuse for recognizing some particular kind of anthropology at all is that there is a body of theory that enables us to do that kind of anthropology.

Social groups are actively *brought into being* through people's speech.

"[I]t is far easier to assume the existence of groups than to try to understand the subtleties of how the natives conceptualize their sociality." (Wagner 1974:119)

Boundary problems

In the Sepik there is "great linguistic diversity, accompanied by wavering linguistic allegiance on the part of families in border villages, and even larger units." (Mead 1938:157)

"There is . . . a tacit acceptance of the 'one language = one culture' assumption, and a concentration on phenomena internal to the language or culture in question, with a consequent neglect, even underrating, of boundary problems of all sorts." (Sankoff 1980:118)

Bernard Narokobi (c.1943-2010)

The MELANESIAN WAY
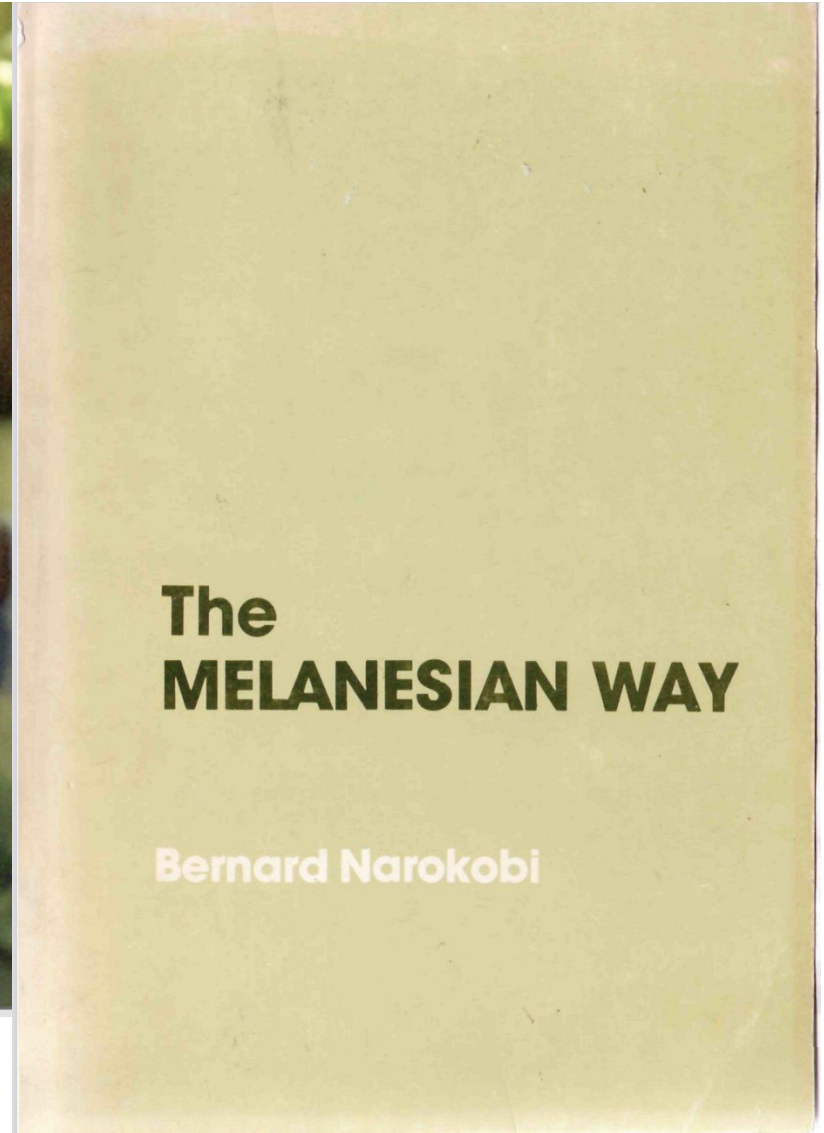
Bernard Narokobi

# Bernard Narokobi's History of Wautogik Village

Preface

Today, the last day of August, 1999, at 3:35 pm at Jackson's Airport, I, Bernard Narokobi, begin to write again the history of my village. I say "write again" because for the last ten years I have been writing on and off the history of my village. Unfortunately, that book is lost. I did a search for two days in my house at Gerehu and cannot locate what I wrote.

Regrettably, I have to start all over again. Much of what I write now is a recollection of what I heard from my father, Anton Narokobi, years ago. My father has been dead for twelve years and I fear my recollection may not be so accurate. Still, it is better to write what I know and allow others who heard, if they heard anything different, to write differently, or correct me.

So it is that I write this story, for I fear that if I do not write, no one will. I feel the urge to write because just as a day fades into darkness so do our memories fade from realities into fantasy and eventually silence. Death scatters our memories.

Naku yeməg ətiɲ, wis ətɨs
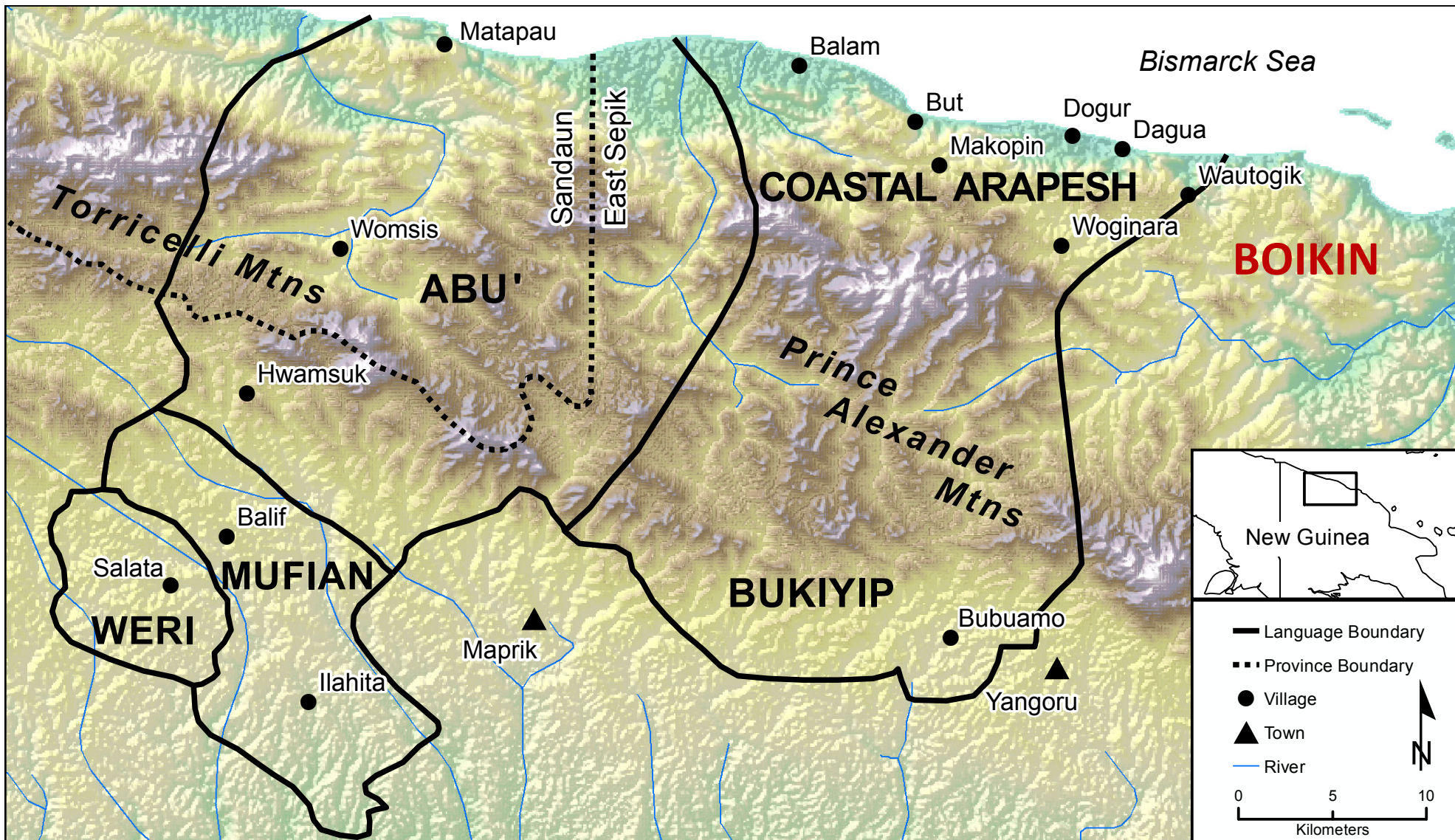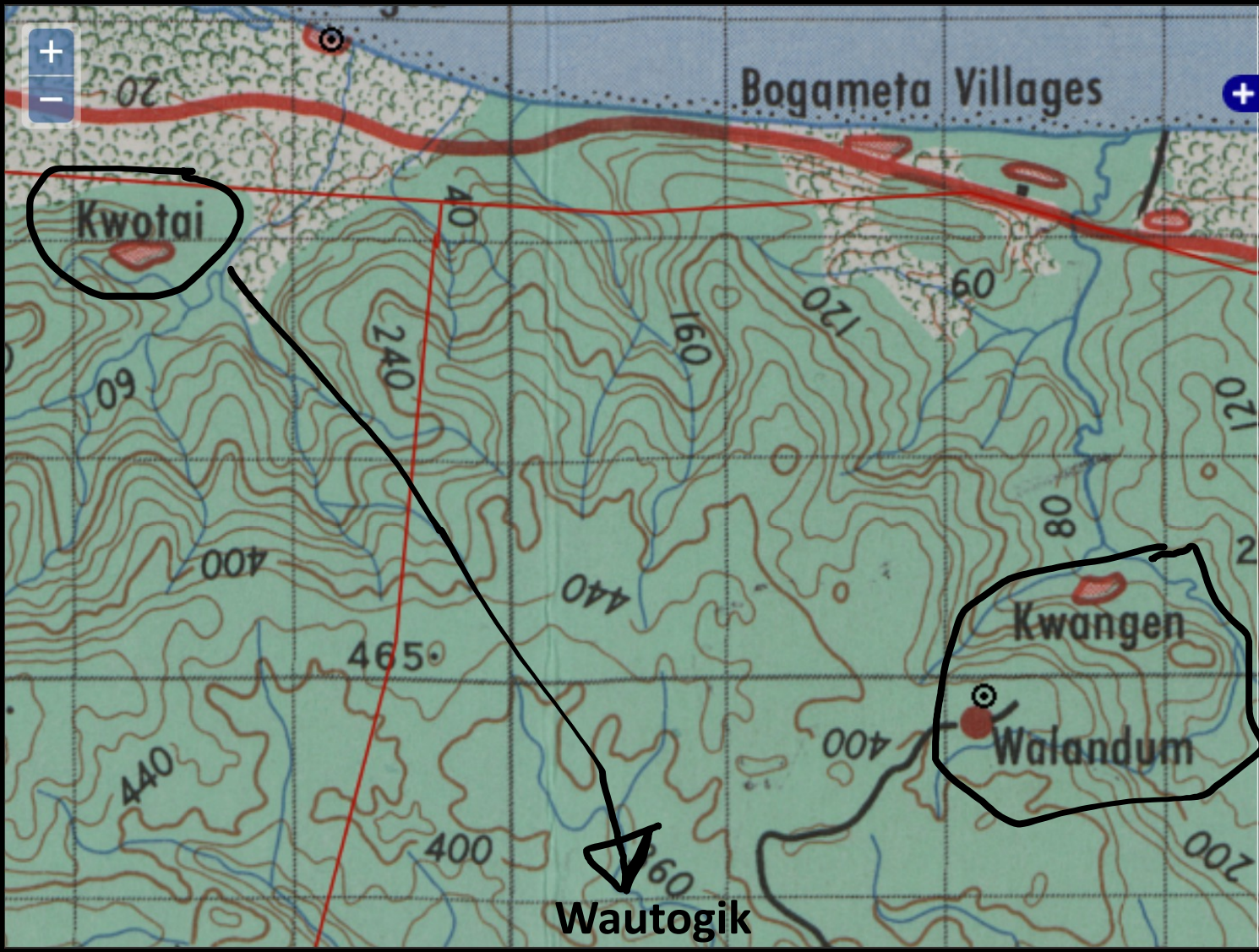
'He just used his face, only his hands'.

Əriə naku yeməg etiɲ, narikən, naka— naku wis nakəripon naka, "Yowi."

'And so he used just his face, and he said— he used his hands and he said, "Come here"'.

In this way, two strangers who spoke different languages established trust and friendship. [...] In time [the founding ancestors] Yəhələgɨr and [his wife] Swagien had a daughter and she married [the Boikin-speaking] Meliawi's son. From this marriage, Wautogig village was born.

From the very beginning, Wautogig was founded on the language and customs of the Buki or Arapesh people, through Yəhələgɨr, and the Sausa or Boikin people through Meliawi [of Kwangen]. Wautogig still maintains a connection to both groups.

— Bernard Narokobi, *The History of Wautogik Village*, Chapter 9: A New Era Begins

The story of the "Kwangen-Baimrɨbɨs Swap":

A Wautogik clan acquires for itself Boikin-speaking ancestors, along with the lands they formerly occupied.
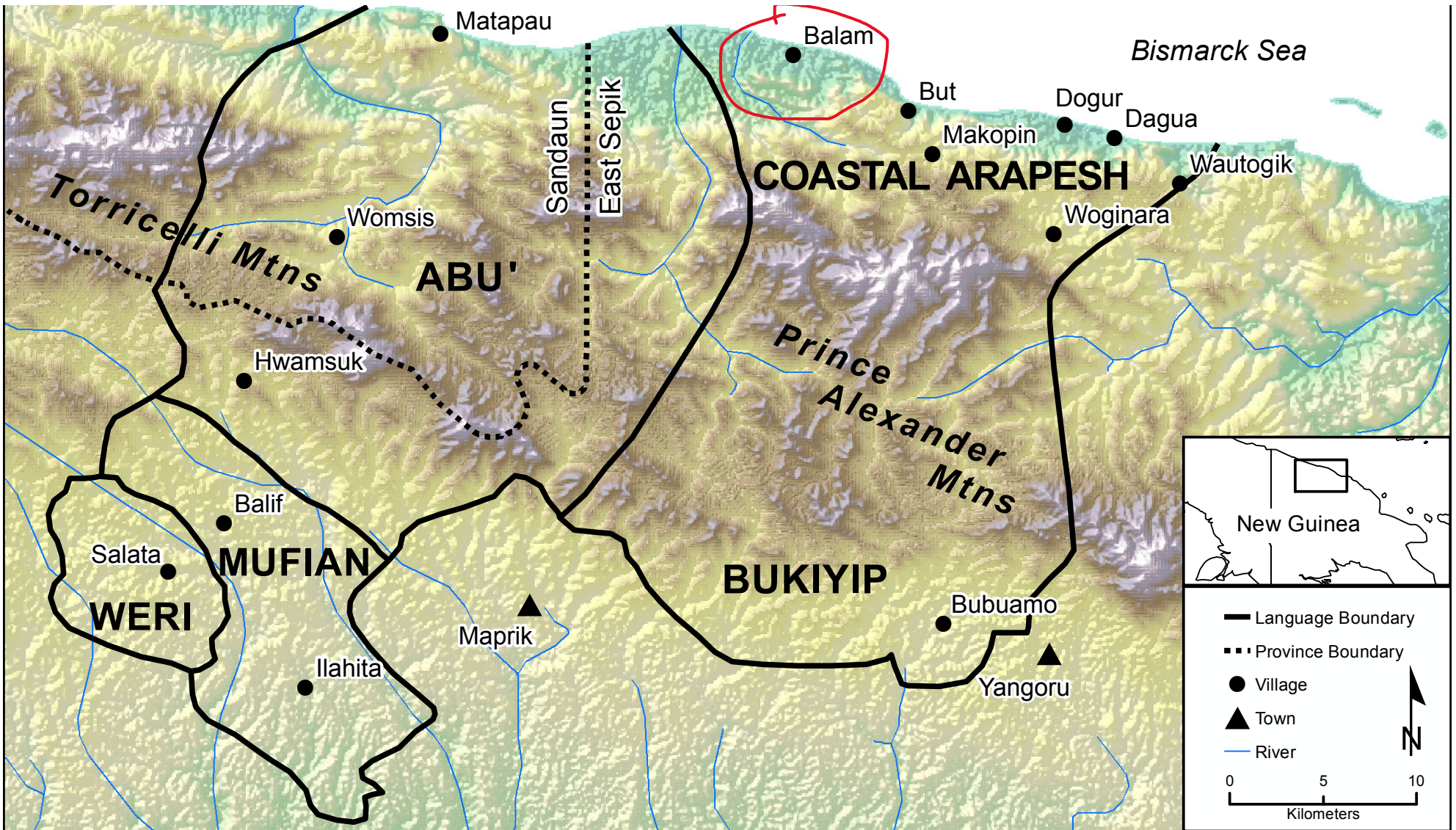
Arapesh villagers in Balam created an unlikely long-distance friendship with people from Ŋamikum:

"And they too, our [ancestors] too, they didn't know [the Ŋamikums'] vernacular, their language, and they too didn't know our language. They just used their hands. They spoke to each other using their hands. They didn't understand [each other]." (r2.10-11)

"Because of its [Arapesh] origins, [Wautogik] people primarily speak Buki and practise Buki or Arapesh customs. But because of the very early contact with Walanduom…, the friendship Yəhələgɨr made with Meliawi of Kwangen, and later through the Kwangen-Baimrɨbɨs land swap, Wautogik's Sausa [Boikin] instinct remains firm and strong. The people of Wautogig also dance and sing Sausa dances and speak Sausa language."

— Bernard Narokobi, *The History of Wautogik Village*, Chapter 10: Wautogig as a Nation and the Surrounding Nations

"The former Governor, Philip Taku, MP for Port Moresby Northeast and my brother Camillus and I... are the inheritors of the original relationship. Although we live in the city and hold state offices, we continue to uphold and honour the first-contact relationship. Although we belong to different political parties, we continue to honour our relationship today. We are trading partners, but not of filial relationship. We call each other *hula*."

— Bernard Narokobi, *The History of Wautogik Village*, Chapter 5: Heimeri-Kapowia and the Yaimbon-Hula Road

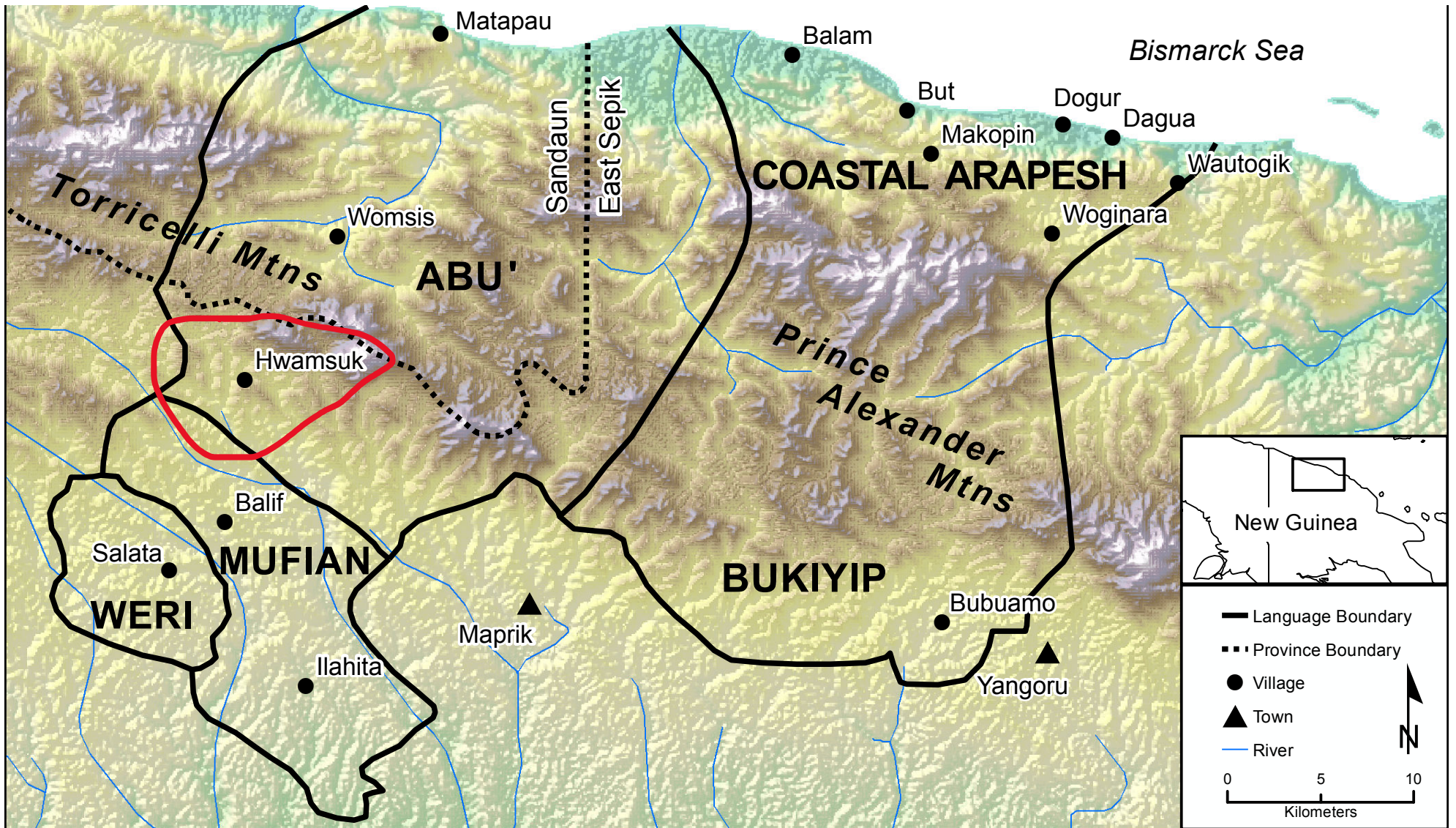# Personhood and linguistic identity, purism and variation

William A. Foley

1. The Herderian equation: linguistic ideology in the West

Linguistic ideology can be defined as that cluster of beliefs that a particular speech community holds about the form and function of language. Speech communities vary in size and network density, and this can be linked to variations in linguistic ideology, a good example being the contrast between most educated laypersons' general prescriptive beliefs about language, e.g. the standard language is best and to be emulated, with variations from this stigmatised, versus professional linguists' descriptivist views, which value all varieties equally and attempt to describe each without prejudice. Of course, even within a community such as professional linguists, there are subgroups with their own ideological beliefs about language, such as critical discourse analysts versus minimalist grammarians. It is important to understand that ideological beliefs are not theories per se, but rather the background of largely unexamined assumptions that guide the construction of specific theories, be they folk theories or scientific ones.

What concerns me here are some of the central ideas about language that have guided European political and educational policies toward language over the last few centuries. These beliefs were clearly articulated by the German Romantic philosopher Herder, who argued for an essential correlation between the language of a community

Matapau

Balam

Bismarck Sea

But

Dogur

Makopin

Dagua

COASTAL ARAPESH

Wautogik

Womsis

Woginara

Sandaun

East Sepik

ABU'

Torricelli Mtns

Prince

Hwamsuk

Alexander

Mtns

Balif

MUFIAN

BUKIYIP

Salata

Bubuamo

WERI

Maprik

Yangoru

Ilahita

New Guinea

— Language Boundary

···· Province Boundary

● Village

▲ Town

— River

N

0   5   10

Kilometers

The Abu'-speaking Memelebis community

An ancestral spirit cursed the people of Memelebis with an inability to acquire outside knowledge, blocked their access to wealth and cargo, and limited their speech to only their own language.

What the Memelebis people have been cursed with is the Herderian equation that keeps them tied to the language they inherited as a consequence of belonging to a particular group!

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**The Acquisition of Other People's Languages:
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THANK YOU!

**Lise M. Dobrin
University of Virginia, USA**   **LSPNG 2021**