Background and Technical Guide
for reading Natqgu grammar sketch and autobiography of Simon G. Meabr

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1. Introduction

In order to avoid repeating background and technical information multiple times in the Natqgu [ntu] grammar sketch and the four interlinearized volumes of Mr. Simon Meabr's autobiographical text, this document provides that information and serves as a guide to all five volumes. The topics included here are the following: §2 on fieldwork, §3 on the FLEx lexical database, §4 on the author of the autobiography and his story, §5 on the arrangement of the interlinearization and §6 on the editorial decisions I made in the text. These are followed by five appendices, including abbreviations, grammatical tables, a catalogue of the scientific names of plants in the text, and two maps.

2. Fieldwork

My family was based on Santa Cruz Island from 1988 to 2006, with intermittent trips to the capital, Honiara, and a 12-month furlough back in the US every fifth year. My husband, Dan, and I were advisors to the Natqgu Language Project (NLP), which worked on Bible translation (Meabr & Yrpusz 2008), vernacular literacy education materials catalogued in Boerger (2015), and production of church-related products, like the Anglican prayer book (Boerger & Boerger 2000). Dan and I were adopted into clans of two neighboring villages and our two sons grew up on the island with relatives everywhere.

At the peak around 2002, the NLP team was comprised of:

- five translators; two were full time; including a pastor and an Anglican priest
- two literacy workers, who conducted workshops around the island
- two scripture review coordinators, who elicited feedback on the translation
- one key terms coordinator, who searched the dialects for translation concepts
- three scripture use workers, who encouraged churches to use the translated texts,
- and one typist, who keyboarded material for literacy work

Their ages spanned from young people in their twenties to the senior translator, Simon G. Meabr, in his sixties and seventies during the process. Our target age group for the translation was people around 25 at the time we started, who like many of the team members, would be 45 by the time the translation was finished.

Our house was right at the border between the two villages into which we were adopted and between which there was a small dialect boundary based on pronunciation, but not vocabulary. One of the two full-time translators was another village away from one of these villages. The other was Mr. Simon G. Meabr (SGM), author of an autobiography which is the focus text for the grammar sketch.

3. Lexical database

Over those nearly twenty years working with the NLP, I added words to a lexical database in Toolbox, which was later imported to FLEx[1] and which now hosts the Natqgu database I continue to update, working with speakers through a Natqgu language group on Facebook. Following initial fieldwork focused on Bible translation and related activities, the number of entries was around 5,500. In 2015, I returned to Santa Cruz with a team of seven US interns to conduct a Rapid Word Collection workshop in collaboration with about 25 Natqgu speakers. The goal was to collect words in all semantic domains using the collect word tool in FLEx. Doing so, we were

[1] FLEx is the lexical database software Fieldworks Language Explorer (https://software.sil.org/fieldworks/).

able to double the number of entries to the current total of 11,837 (Boerger & Stutzman 2018). A Natqgu dictionary is planned as my next major project.

4. The author and his story

The examples in the grammar sketch are primarily based on the work of Simon G. Meabr. The major source text is his hand-written autobiography, ntu-029-2000-writ-prs-bhb-007,[2] entitled, *The Book of My Story: What I Saw Happen.* It was typed, imported into FLEx, interlinearized, and then the interlinearized text was extracted, formatted, and edited.

In the book-length text he recounts his own life events along with the history and culture of Santa Cruz Island and elsewhere in Solomon Islands. He was born in 1921 and died in 2013. His first language, Nalögo [nlz], is spoken in southern Santa Cruz, near Nea village. He married twice, with both wives being Natqgu speakers. In addition to these two Santa Cruz languages, he also knew Solomon Islands Pijin, English, and Mota [mtt], a Vanuatu language used historically by the Anglican Church as the language of wider communication in its early presence in Solomon Islands. His education was primarily in Mota and he enjoyed Christmas caroling in Mota with his contemporaries who also grew up in that context.

This Natqgu SGM text is comprised of 82 titled episodes distributed over fifteen chapters, with a total of 1150 sentences, not including chapter or episode headings. As such, it is the longest natively authored narrative text in Natqgu, making it linguistically significant with regard to spelling, vocabulary, sentence complexity, discourse conventions, and overall organization. Scans of the handwritten documents are slated for future archiving[3] as part of the Natqgu corpus (Boerger & Boerger, in progress).

For publication purposes, the text is divided into four volumes as in Table 1.

Table 1. SGM text by volumes and topics

TILP	Chapters	Episodes	Titles
Volume 1	1-3	1-14	Childhood and natural disasters
Volume 2	4-7	15-35	Youth and early education
Volume 3	8-12	36-57	World War II in Solomon Islands
Volume 4	13-15	58-82	Teacher and Translator

The Melanesian Brothers of the Anglican Church, a not-for-life monastic order, arranged for Simon to attend boarding school elsewhere in the country. His first headmaster on Ulawa Island was the Reverend Dr. Charles Elliot Fox (1878-1977), who is known by linguists for his grammars and dictionaries of Arosi [aia] and Lau [llu]. Simon was at school on Guadalcanal when World War II reached the country, with a quarter of his episodes recounting wartime events. While away from Santa Cruz, he spent time on islands in three other provinces—Makira-Ulawa, Guadalcanal, and Malaita, meeting people from different languages, cultures, and religions, including allied military personnel.

Following the war, he finished his education, and after 13 years away, returned to Santa Cruz Island, to work as a primary school headmaster, serving in multiple schools around the island. His 22-year career as a school teacher gave him the title ‘Mister,’ which he held the rest of

[2] I thankfully acknowledge the contributions of following people and groups who were instrumental in producing and refining the SGM text itself: Wycliffe Associates UK; Natqgu Language Facebook Group members, especially LC Shirley Balq, Mel Humz, Ethel Lano Mapolu, Alice Meabir, Freddie Mekupe, Cecil Mona, Kennedy Olu, Gabriel Spencer, Glass Ulysis Yanops, Andrew Yavenga, and others; Solomon Islands Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey, especially Dalton Hone, Chief Cartographer; Bishop Terry Brown, ret.; Dr. Sarah Moeller and her University of Florida computer programming student; Ilyn Winia, Beth Andrews, and Karen Ashley.

[3] The Natqgu materials will be minimally archived with SIL in the Language and Culture Archives, and possibly also with PARADISEC depending on funding. I also plan to deposit the materials in Honiara, Solomon Islands with Solomon Islands Translation Advisory Group (SITAG) and at the Kati School computer station on Santa Cruz. The goal is to provide easy access to those most likely to want access to the materials.

his life. After retiring at age 55, he became the lead Natqgu Bible translator, a career spanning another thirty years. *The Natqgu New Testament, Psalms, and Ruth* (Meabr & Yrpusz 2008) was published and dedicated in 2008.

5. Reading the interlinear formatting

The sentences of the SGM text follow a four-line pattern and are numbered throughout by Episode and sentence number within that episode. For example, 04.02 indicates the second sentence in episode four.

I use two orthographies. Line 1 is an older orthography with diacritics which make it linguist friendly and shows the surface forms of words. Then line 2 divides words into morphemes using the new orthography currently in use making it Natqgu-speaker friendly, and shows the underlying forms.

The two orthographies used are shown in Appendix B. In some languages of the Solomon Islands, the straight apostrophe symbolizes a glottal stop consonant, with the International Phonetic Alphabet symbol [ʔ], but in Natqgu it indicates nasalization. The four lines of the interlinearizations are as follows:

- line 1-an earlier orthography with diacritics,
- line 2-the new orthography with morpheme breaks,
- line 3-the English glosses, and
- line 4-an English translation with my editorial notes in square brackets and a lighter font.

In the grammar sketch, the selected examples from the SGM text follow the same four-line pattern. But they are independently numbered sequentially throughout the grammar, with their SGM textual location indicated in parentheses following the English translation. Often, only the relevant portion of a complex sentence is used in the grammar in order to save space. In addition, data from the *Natqgu New Testament, Psalms, and Ruth* are used sparingly in the grammar examples, limited mostly to books translated by Mr. Simon, so that a single idiolectal grammar is represented throughout.

Also in the grammar sketch, the morpheme or construction under discussion is in a **bold** font, with occasional underlining and [bracketing] to mark and divide longer constructions. Abbreviations for functional glosses are in a small caps Unicode font, and are included as Appendix A. I use *Ethnologue* ISO codes (Eberhard et al 2020) for languages referred to and Simon's initials, **SGM**, to refer to him or to his autobiographical text.

6. Editorial decisions

While editing the Natqgu SGM text, I stayed as close to Mr. Simon's text as possible. His original handwritten document in block script included places where paragraphs were crossed out and later rewritten, or where words were added and scrunched into the space available. It also had entire sections circled with arrows pointing to where they belonged. The volunteer typists and my checks of their work attempted to accurately interpret his intentions. Thankfully, his handwriting is easy to read, which made that task less difficult than it might otherwise have been.

Spelling & dialectal vocabulary. Since some words used by Mr. Simon were not from the target dialect or in the standardized spellings established by the Natqgu Language Program, slight adjustments were made to conform to standardized spellings. I eliminated Nalögo [nlz] words and substituted Natqgu words, but preserved Natqgu's Balo dialect vocabulary choices.

Mr. Simon transliterated non-Natqgu proper names into the closest Natqgu spelling. It required considerable research to discover the English spellings of these names. Notes about these are included in the SGM text.

Dates. The dates listed for Mr. Simon's ancestors in the first episode are approximations. There were at least other two places in his text where historical documents gave different months

or years than those written by Mr. Simon. So I changed his dates to conform to the established historical record. For the severe cyclone of Episode 12, I found no confirming historical record, which could make Mr. Simon's account the only existing documentation of that event.

Organization of episodes. Episode 11 was written previously in a writers' workshop. But in the written SGM text, he noted where it occurred chronologically. So I inserted the earlier story into the text at the place indicated, giving a fuller coverage of the events of his life and a richer overall text. In another place, I moved a concluding section to make it the opening section of the next episode, where it seemed to fit better.

7. Appendix A: Abbreviations Used

1	first person
1+2	1st plus 2nd person
2	second person
3	third person
A	transitive agent
ACC	accusative base
APPL	applicative
ASS	associative
AT	attributor
AUG	augmented
CAPPL	core applicatives
CAUS	causative
CFL	classifier
COM	comitative
CMPL	completive
COS	change of state
DAT	dative base
DEIC	deictic
DEM	demonstrative
DPV	depictive
DER	derivational
DSTR	distributive
DIST	distal (far)
DU	dual
GEN1A	genitive
GEN1B	alternate gen form
GDIR.in	geometric directional
GDIR.out	geometric directional
GDIR.up	geometric directional
GDIR.down	geometric directional
I	set 1 enclitic nom prn
II	set 2 enclitic other prn
IMP	imperative
INDF	indefinite
INTJ	interjection
INTS	intensifier
IPFV	imperfect(ive)
IRR	irrealis
LOC	locative
MID	middle
MIN	minimal
NEG	negation
NMLZ	nominalizer
O	transitive object
ORD	ordinal
PAS	passive
PCLF.feel	feeling classifier
PCLF.hand	handheld classifier
PCLF.betel	betelnut classifier
PCLF.drink	drink classifier
PCLF.food	food classifier
PCLF.rsbl	responsibility classifier
PCLF.B&G	buildings & grounds classifier
PCLF.assoc	associative classifier
PCLF.fire	hearth & home classifier
PCLF	possessive classifier
PDIR.hither	personal directional
PDIR.yon	personal directional
P	patient, enclitic object
PFV	perfective
PLCT	pluractional
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PN	proper name
PRN	pronoun base
PREP	preposition
PROH	prohibitive
PROP	proprietive
PROX	proximal
QNT	quantifier, quantity
RECP	reciprocal
REFL	reflexive
RL	realis
RPRN	relative pronoun base
S	intransitive subject
SG	singular
SUBR	subordinator
SPEC	specific, specifier
STR	semitransitive
TPNYM	toponymic
TR	transitivizer
V	verb

8. Appendix B: Tables of forms

Table 2. Old and New Natügu Vowel Orthographies

old	new	IPA	Examples		English glosses
a	a	a	*kalva*	*kalva*	betel nut
e	e	e	*neke*	*neke*	who, interrogative
i	i	i	*mibi*	*mibi*	rotten
o	o	o	*itoto*	*itoto*	infant
u	u	u	*tumu*	*tumu*	triggerfish
â	c	ɔ	*nâdâ*	*ncdc*	carrying stick from which things hang
ü	q	y	*nümü*	*nqmq*	way, tradition, character
ö	r	ɵ	*möbö*	*mrbr*	forget
ä	x	æ	*käökä*	*kxrkx*	that which is spicy
ë	z	ə	*ëvë*	*zvz*	always

Note Natqgu consonants:

The inventory of Natqgu consonants is: /p, t, k, b, d, g, m, n, ŋ, ß, s, w, j/

[ŋ] is represented by <ng>

[ß] is represented by <v>

[j] is represented by <y> and

[dž] is represented by <j>, which occurs in other Santa Cruz languages and English borrowings.

Table 3. Simple Demonstratives

	proximal		distal	
listener anchored	*la*	DEM1.PROX	*lc*	DEM1.DIST
speaker anchored	*ka*	DEM2.PROX	*kc*	DEM2.DIST

Table 4. Natqgu Set I person and number enclitics & glosses[4]

	Set I			
	1	**gloss**	**2**	**gloss**
Person	Verbal subject enclitics		Verbal object enclitics	
minimal				
1	*=x*	1 MINI		
1+2	*=ki*	12MINI		
2	*=u*	2 MINI		
3	*=le* (A, O) *=Ø* (S)	3MINIA 3MINIS	*=le*	3MINIP
augmented				
1	*=kr*	1AUGI		
1+2	*=ku*	12AUGI		
2	*=amu*	2AUGI		
3	*=lr* (A) *=ng(q)* (S)	3AUGIA 3AUGIS	*=lr* *=ng(q)*	3AUGIP

Table 5. Natqgu Set II person and number enclitics

	Set II						
	3		**4**	**5**		**6**	
Person	Verbal enclitics	gloss	Possessive construction enclitics	Free pronouns	gloss	Indirect object pronouns	gloss
minimal							
1	*=nge*	1 MINII	*=nge*	*ni=nge*	be =1MINII	*ba=nge*	DAT= 1MINII
1+2	*=gi*	12MINII	*=gi*	*ni=gi*	be=12MINII	*ba=gi*	DAT=12MINII
2	*=m(q)*	2 MINII	*=mq*	*ni=mq*	be =2MINII	*ba=mq*	DAT= 2MINII
3	*=de*	3MINII	*=de*	*ni=de*	be=3MINII	*ba=de*	DAT=3MINII
augmented							
1	*=gr*	1AUGII	*=gr*	*ni=gr*	be=1AUGII	*ba=gr*	DAT=1AUGII
1+2	*=gu*	12AUGII	*=gu*	*ni=gu*	be=12AUGII	*ba=gu*	DAT=12AUGII
2	*=mu*	2AUGII	*=mu*	*ni=mu*	be=2AUGII	*ba=mu*	DAT=2AUGII
3	*=dr* (A) *=ng(q)* (S)	3AUGII 3AUGII	*=dr*	*ni=dr*	be=3AUGII	*ba=dr*	DAT=3AUGII

[4] Set I and Set II 3AUG forms are circumfixes and occur with one of three prefixes: *nz-* 3AUG, *na-* 3AUG.IRR, or *tz-* 3AUG.RL. In the absence of the suffixal half of the circumfix, these three prefixal forms signal a passive.

Table 6. Genitives and Possessive Classifiers

	Gloss	Meaning	Description	Examples
GEN				
ngr	GEN1A	of, from, genitive	Contents, relationships, location & properties	*zyzlr ngr nepi* 'light of the sun' *lue ngr dxbu* 'water of the lake'
r	GEN1B	variant	Phonologically set, resulting in deletion or palatalization	*olvz r=de* → [olv(z)rde] 'his wife' *esaki r be* → [esakyr be] 'end of story' *lzm r kai* → [lzm r kai] 'bowl of pudding'
-kr	NMLZ.PCLF		possessive of action nominalizations and a few other nouns	*kave kr Sawa* 'Sawa's cousin' *nqmq kr=de* 'his way' *nztulz-kr=de* 'his standing up'
PCLF				
sc	PCLF.hand	handheld	Handheld and moveable possessions; can act as generic possessor	*tengz sc=nge* 'his comb' *nuzmu sc=de* *'his canoe'* *kx-nz-rngi-sc=ng* 'the haves' *kx-tr-nz-rngi-sc-u=ng* 'the have nots'
ma	PCLF.betel	betelnut	and related items, such as leaf, lime, container	*pxi ma Samwi* 'Samwi's leaf' *kalva ma=de* 'his betelnut'
mq	PCLF.drink	drinkables	including wet fruits, like papaya and watermelon	*tabao mq=nge* 'my papaya' *lue mq=m(q)* 'your water'
na	PCLF.food	edibles	all food, except those categorized as drinkable	*nya na Ikai* 'Ikai's taro (food)' *bia na=de* 'his breadfruit (food)'
ne	PCLF.rsbl	underlings	ownership, creation, or responsibility; refers to children, animals, but not spouse or deities	*doa ne Saemon* 'Simon's child' *poi ne=de-ng* 'his pigs' *nabz ne=nge* 'my song' (I wrote)
nyz	PCLF.B&G	property & time	immovable property and time at a fixed point	*ma nyz ile=nge* 'my sister's house' *nrlanc nyz=de* 'his garden' *mzli nyz Noa* 'time of Noah'
mnr~ pnr	PCLF.fire	hearth & home	fire, firewood, blankets, mats, hearth and home	*nqni mnr=de* 'his mat' *nqni pnr Tina* 'Tina's mat' *nabxbq pnr=nge* 'my firepit'
lr	PCLF.assoc	associative	closely associated with or intrinsically part of	*nqvi lr Samwi* 'Samwi's line' [family] *nivz lr lxe=de* 'love of his mother' *dzwr lr popz'* 'strength of the bow' *bq lr nounc* 'sap of a tree'
nr	PCLF.feel	feelings	co-occurs only with thoughts, heart, desires	*nqmq nr drtwrde* 'his way of thinking' *nepu nr drtwrgu* 'our desire of thought'

Table 7. Valency changing morphemes

Morpheme	Gloss	Verbal slot
a-	causative	-1
r-	middle	-1
-lvz	'about'	+2
-ba	reverse	+2
-c	across	+2
-ki	path	+2
-plx	'through'	+2
-sz	'away from'	+2
-sr	'thusly'	+2
-mi	depictive	+2
-neba	'to whom'	+2
-ti	transitivizer	+4
-lzbq	reflexive	+8
-etr	reciprocal	+8
-ngr	applicative	+16
nz->V<=Ø	passive	

9. Appendix C: Scientific names of plants

A. Trees

Natqgu	English (tree)	Latin
nc-bia	Breadfruit	*Artocarpus altilis*
nc-naq	Malay apple	*Syzygium malaccense*
nc-ninz	Ngalinut	*Canarium indicum*
nc-noli	Hog plum	*Spondias dulcis*
nc-nqngq	Rooster tail	*Cordyline fruticose*
nc-nrkr	Pacific teak, kwila	*Intsia bijuga*
nc-nzlu	Coconut	*Cocos nucifera*
nc-saliki	Rudraksha	*Elaeocarpus sphaericus*
nc-tabao	Papaya	*Carica papaya*
nc-tea	Tree fern	*Cyathea vittata*
nc-teomo	Manioc	*Manihot esculenta*

B. Other plants

Natqgu	English	Latin
bqkq	Chayote	*Sechium edule*
drngi	Ming aralia greens	*Polyscias fruticosa*
kilu	vine greens	Possibly *Basella cordifolia* or *Coccinia grandis*
kupli	Sandpaper cabbage	*Ficus copiosa; Ficus wassa*
legou	False monsteriosa creeper vine (Bznwz dialect)	*Monstera minima*
lemwzlo	False monsteriosa creeper vine (Balo dialect)	*Monstera minima*
leuwaga	Bird's nest fern	*Asplenium nidus*
loprta	King tree greens	*Gnetum gnemon*
lxkq	Yam	*Dioscorea alata*
neketu	Wild yam	*Dioscorea sp.*
nesrkr	Lesser yam	*Dioscorea esculenta*
nraleng	Pana*	---
nra soli	King tree fruit	*Gnetum gnemon*
paeli	Wild Pana*	---
*Most pana is considered a variety of lesser yam.		

10. Appendix D: Map

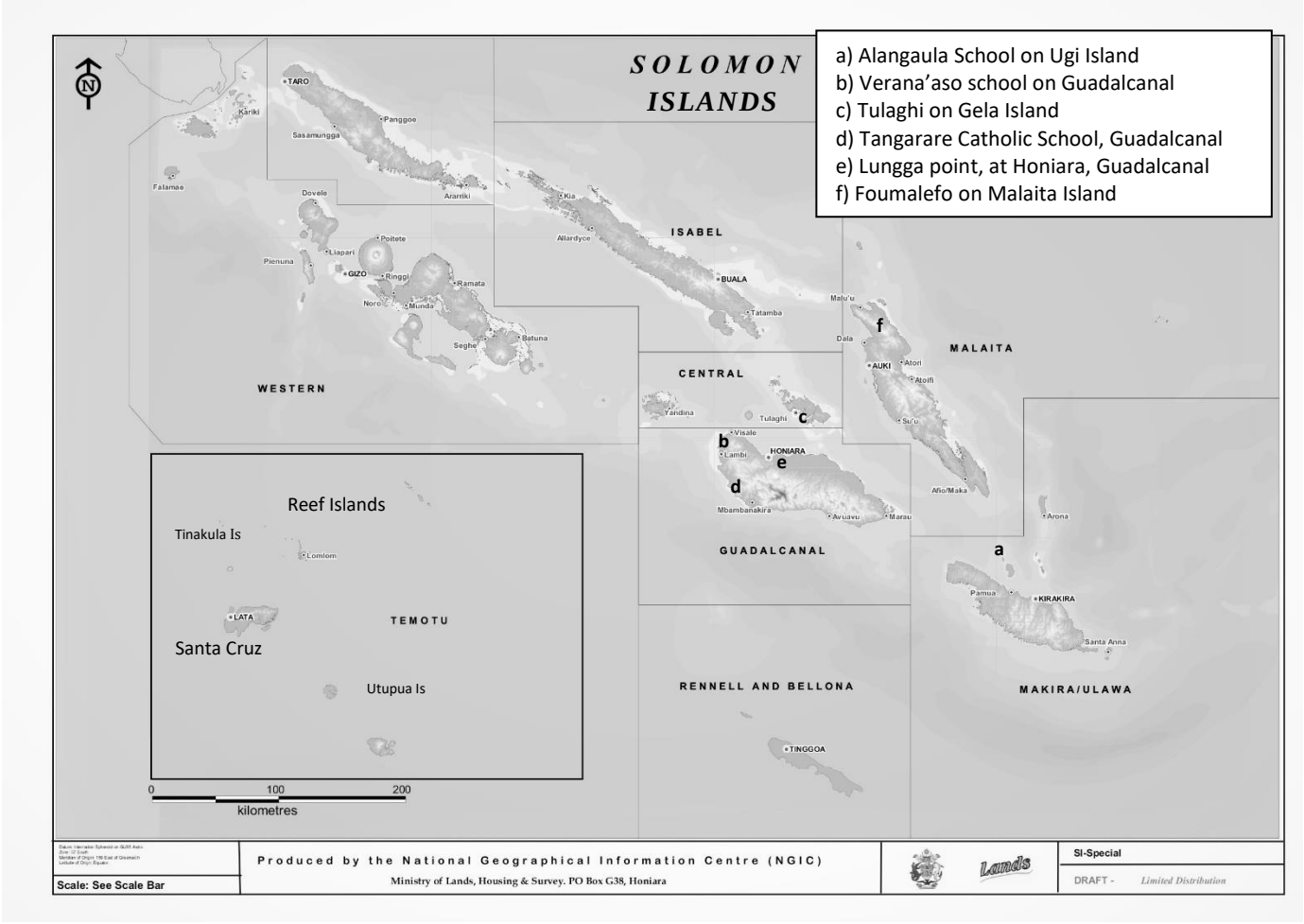
Santa Cruz Island, Temotu Province, Solomon Islands[5]

[5] Used with permission of SI government. Excerpted from Temotu Province, Solomon Islands, A3 Topographic Map series, 2012.

11. Appendix E: Map

Solomon Islands[6]

Temotu Province, represented in the inset is located east of Makira-Ulawa Province. Tikopia and Anuta, in the eastern part of Temotu are missing from the map.



[6] Used with permission of SI government.