

## **Contact and non-contact: Variable outcomes of language contact in Island Melanesia**

This paper compares a number of Papuan and Oceanic languages of Island Melanesia in order to identify differing outcomes of language contact in micro contact situations across this massively diverse linguistic region. Papuan and Oceanic languages have become rather famous for the heavy amount of language contact which has occurred between some of them: compare for example the massive structural borrowing, or metatypy, between Takia and Waskia on the island of Karkar, off the north coast of New Guinea (Ross 1996, 1997), or the situation described for Papuan Sulka and its Oceanic neighbours in the Bismarck Archipelago (Reesink 2005; Reesink & Dunn 2017).

However the language situations compared here, from the Solomon Islands, are shown to be characterised by very great differences in terms of linguistic contact; differences both in type and degree. Note that it is not claimed that the Papuan/Oceanic world is different to other linguistic regions but rather the issues are crystallised here, particularly in the Solomon Islands, the focus of this paper.

Speakers of the Papuan and Oceanic languages of the Solomon Islands have been coexisting for thousands of years (Hunley et al. 2008). Distances between islands are small, cultural continuities are strong (Sheppard & Walter 2006) and therefore this region is a rich area for studies of contact-induced language change (Terrill 2011).

Note that we are in a relatively good position to identify Papuan loans in the Oceanic languages, because the history of Oceanic languages in island Melanesia is comparatively well understood (see e.g. Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2017). In contrast, due to the lack of knowledge about the history of the Papuan languages in the region, possible Oceanic features in the Papuan languages can never be satisfactorily verified as such, but rather can only ever exist as points of speculation.

The paper presents a lexical, phonological and grammatical survey of the four Papuan languages of the Solomon Islands, and six Oceanic languages also spoken in the same region. The survey identifies little evidence of lexical borrowing between Papuan and Oceanic languages (see also Dunn & Terrill 2012), but two promising points of possible phonological and grammatical borrowing. However, I show that both of these features can instead be attributed to regular processes of internal change in each of the languages concerned.

Thus, an intensive study at the micro level of the four Papuan languages of the Solomon Islands, and the Oceanic languages spoken around them, has identified very little in terms of contact-based language change. This is in stark contrast to the type of linguistic outcomes described above for other areas of Island Melanesia.

This phenomenon can be attributed to differing amounts and types of social contact outcomes (Trudgill 2011). Importantly, language contact is not a necessary consequence of long-term coexistence in the same cultural sphere: in fact we have good evidence here that languages can be in contact for thousands of years with very little shared linguistic material to show for it.

## References

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