

## Multilingualism and Social Networks among Language Speaking Communities of Wondama Bay, Papua, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*The article aims at describing the contribution of multilingualism in studying traditional patterns of social networks and social relations among language speaking communities in Wondama Bay, Papua, Indonesia. This area is a multilingual area in which multilingualism reflects the complexities of social identity that contribute to social networks and social relations established for centuries. The nature of multilingualism produces other patterns of language use such as lingua franca, language shifted, language switched, language mixed, and language endangerment. These language phenomena may be used to analyze social networks and among language speaking communities in this region. Some social practices such as socio-cultural activities, political and economic motivations and the practices of slavery are among social activities that are shared by people across social and cultural boundaries and those are reflected by the establishment of multilingualism and such a society is considered a common practice in Papua.*

**Keywords:** Multilingualism, social networks, language patterns, Wondama Bay, Papua.

### INTRODUCTION:

The use of language and the social activities are basically bound to each other and are inseparable as language is considered as a social behavior or a social activity as it reflects social life, kinds of social practices, social identity such as language used in customary events are different from language used in daily conversations, or different social castes may use different styles of language. Language is not just about its grammar that triggers the operation of the language as a rational and predicted tool of communication, but it is also a manifestation of a social system. (Kroft, 2003) asserts, “language is obviously a social phenomenon: its central function is interpersonal communication. Thus, one might expect language to be sensitive to social structure.” Language therefore can characterize social strata, social system, social pattern, social relation and social networks of any language speaking communities. This is solely the domain of sociolinguistic study that mainly investigates variations languages and patterns of language use that reflect the social activities.

Papua reflects an area on earth where its linguistic ecology and its sociolinguistic situation are very diverse and complex. Out of more than 1,000 languages spoken in New Guinea, it has approximately 270 languages spoken in Papua (Simons & Charles, 2018). The Wondama Bay, in particular, traditionally has 10 languages spoken by different language speaking communities. Socially, these language speaking communities have a long contact history that traditionally establishes social networks and social relations among these people. The social networks and social relations that reflect the patterns of inter- and intra- communication among people in this area then obviously contribute to the establishment of multilingualism. Today, multilingualism is the main characteristic of social system in the Wondama Bay.

This paper is basically an observation of the relationship between language patterns and social practices and social factors that contribute to the multilingualism. Multilingualism is defined as all language practices that

commonly reflect social activities across social groups in the Wondama Bay region.

### **SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW:**

The study uses two theoretical foundations, which are sociolinguistics and social network analysis. Sociolinguistics, study of language and society, mainly focuses on the patterns of language usage found in a society or across societies. There are two aspects that sociolinguistics can provide to analyze the language use in the Wondama Bay area – patterns of language use and language as social identity. First, sociolinguistics provides an approach to analyze variations patterns of language use such as multilingualism, *lingua franca*, language shift, language switched and language mixed among people living in the Wondama Bay area. Multilingualism is a situation in which a speaker/a language community uses more than one language in a normal way of communication. The central question for this situation is “*why do people in Wondama Bay tend to be multilingual?*” This question will lead to the investigation of multiple non-linguistic factors – sociological, psychological, cognitive factors and or economic, politic and cultural motivations that contribute to the competency of an individual or social group to speak more than one language (Heller and Pavlenko 2010). Understanding multilingualism will give a comprehensive look to linguistic capacity that form other patterns of language use such as *lingua franca*, language shift, language switch, mixed language, and language endangerment. Language as social identity is another key issue in sociolinguistics. (Thomas, et al., 1999) assert that language is a key element for people of a social group to construct their social identity and they will operate their choice of linguistic code in order to represent them to other social groups. Each social group in Wondama Bay uses their native language to represent their social identity among other social groups in the area. They also build their multilingual competence as a part of bigger social identity which is ‘being part of the multilingual societies’ in the area.

Social Network Analysis is an approach used to understand the concept of social networks to determine the degree of density and multiplexity in the language speaking communities around Wondama Bay about how an individual or a society use other languages and the social motivations that trigger the patterns of language use (Stahl, 1988, p. 83). It focuses on describing three main components of social system such as an agent (language speaking communities), network (socio-cultural, politic, economic activities) and social resources that are shared together by these language speaking communities and build social relations among language speaking communities. Language is seen as a channel in communication to easily transfer socio-cultural resources among language groups in the area.

By maximizing these two fields of studies, the relationships between language and its society are explored in order to understand two social components that build out social system and in that system, all social resources are manipulated for the sake of language speaking communities. Multilingualism and patterns of language use is seen as a model that reflects a complexity of social networks among language speaking communities in the Wondama Bay area.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The study focuses on investigating social networks through patterns of language use. Patterns of language use are observed through sociolinguistic survey done in 2014 in which the survey was conducted in several language speaking villages representing 9 language speaking communities and across language speaking communities for Papuan Malay. The population of each village consists of multilingual speakers. There is no village that has monolingual speakers (Sawaki, 2004). In regards to the survey, there was a sociolinguistic questionnaire consisting of questions related to language profiles (name of languages, location of language, number of native speakers, dialects, and language speaking villages), language use and language patterns spoken by people in one village and across villages with different language backgrounds. The goal of these questions is to get information about what languages and how languages are used by their speakers within their language communities and across language communities and what factors that motivate the native speakers to use one or more languages. By analyzing responses to these questions, the current research identifies social and linguistic factors triggering multilingualism, *lingua franca*, language shift, language switched, language mixed and language endangerment. Other linguistic information about these languages are taken from [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com) that give a linguistic and sociolinguistic overview about languages.

To supplement the sociolinguistic questionnaire, the survey also used an ethnographical questionnaire. The ethnographic questionnaire aims at gathering information about the society and their socio-cultural practices such as political system, economic (trading system), slavery practices and traditional linkage between social

groups in the area. The survey also contained the questions to investigate the social relations among different people from different ethnic groups living in one villages and how they can communicate.

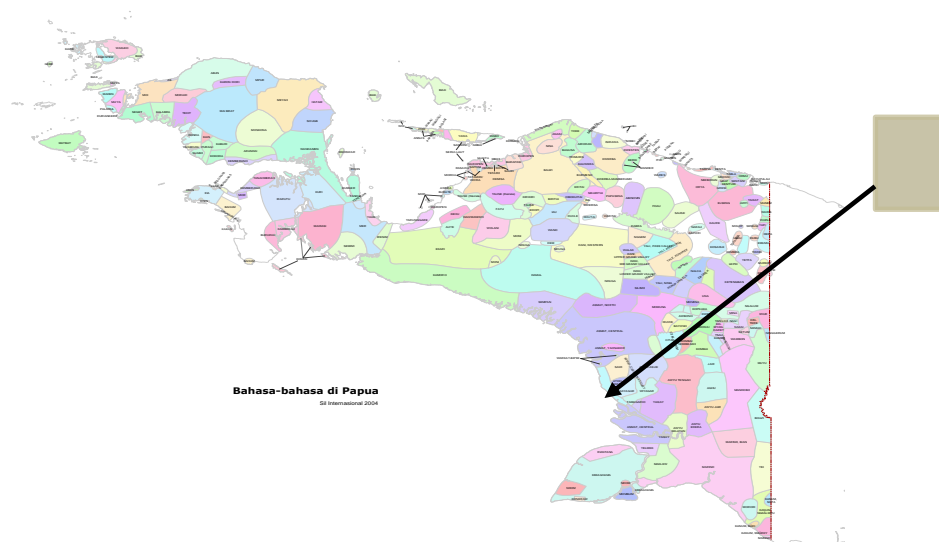
By analyzing the sociolinguistic questionnaire and the ethnographic questionnaire, we can see the relations between the patterns of language use and the patterns of social networks practices among people in Wondama Bay, Papua, Indonesia. Any factors that contribute to the relationship of these two aspects were obviously identifiable.

**PATTERNS OF LANGUAGE USE AMONG LANGUAGE SPEAKING COMMUNITIES IN WONDAMA BAY:**

Linguistically, there are 10 languages spoken in the Wondama Bay area. The number of languages basically represents 10 different socio-cultural groups which are different in socio-historical backgrounds. Linguistically, these 10 language groups are divided into 8 Austronesian language groups and 2 Papuan language groups. The Austronesian languages occupy the coastal areas along the bay. They are Wandamen (±7,000 speakers), Dusner (only 3), Tandia (only 8), Roon (±1,200), Roswar (±250), Ambumi (±700), Kuri (±500) and Papuan Malay (±15,000). The Papuan languages are Miere (±140) and Mairasi (±3,300) (Anceaux, 1961), (Blust, 1933), (Gil, 2010). Note that Papuan Malay is a pidginized lingua franca used among other language groups in Papua including the Wondama Bay region but has been acquired as the second or first language for many people. Thus, it is counted as one of languages considered important in this study (Sawaki, 2017).

Today, the seven language communities – Wandamen, Roon, Roswar, Ambumi, Kuri, Miere and Mairasi – use their languages fluently and actively in their social activities for intra-communicative goals. Two languages, Tandia and Dusner, are not actively used in all social activities and are considered severely endangered (Dalrymple & Suriel, 2012); (Sawaki, 2017). Their speakers have negative attitudes toward their languages so they have no positive functions in their communities. They prefer to use Wandamen and Papuan Malay as the language for communication. Speakers of the 9 languages speak Wandamen and Papuan Malay actively as a lingua franca besides their own languages. Papuan Malay in particular has become a language of communication in all social domains. The history and linguistic features of Papuan Malay can be studied in (Kluge, 2014), Sawaki (2004), and (Donohue & Yusuf, 2007).





**Map 1: Linguistic situation in the Wondama Bay area in Papua, Indonesia (SIL, 2004)**

Long before Malay was introduced to this area around late 1800, multilingualism has influenced language patterns among multiethnic people of Wondama Bay. At least, most of people show some degree of multilingualism. They can speak more languages than their own native languages. Most people in this area can speak Wandamen, a native language of Wondama/Wamesa people as a lingua franca, especially those who come from small language groups such as Tandia, Dusner, Ambumi, Roon, Roswar, Miere, Mairasi and Kuri. Speakers of these small language groups are active users of Wandamen language – the dominant language – in cultural, social, political and economic domains. Thus, language shift, language switch and language mixing are very common in the communication patterns among these people.

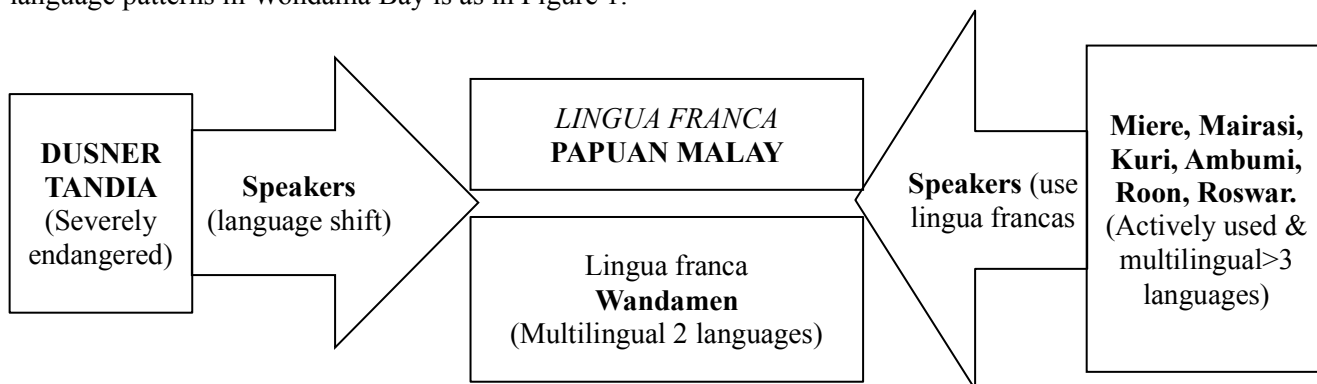
As Wandamen is the dominant language, its speakers traditionally tend to be monolingual. Unlike speakers of other small language groups, Wandamen speakers only speak their own language. It can be understood that their traditional socio-cultural power including language have dominated all aspects of life in the area. This affects the language patterns of multilingual communities in the area. Small language speaking communities tend to be multilingual; whereas, the Wondama people tend to be monolingual.

In terms of social mobility, language speaking communities that are more mobile in terms of their ability to travel around are more multilingual than others. For instance, Miere and Mairasi are mobile social groups so they can speak other languages ranging from 3 up to 7 languages. Speakers of Roon, Roswar and Ambumi are still quite mobile so they can speak at least 3-4 languages. These mobile groups are those in which ‘language switch’ and ‘language mixing’ are very common. Wandamen is more stable and dominant so the speakers tend to just speak one language – their own language. Tandia and Dusner are socially more unstable language groups in which they have shifted their languages to Wandamen. Their speakers now become Wandamen language speakers. Note that Tandia only has 8 passive speakers and Dusner only has 3 active speakers are evidence of this social instability. The traditional language patterns of language speaking communities form the following multilingual phenomena in the area:

**Table 1: Multilingual phenomena and social movement among language speaking communities in Wondama Bay**

Degree of multilingualism	Language groups	Social movement
Multilingual speakers (= 3 to >3 languages)	Miere, Mairasi, Kuri	More mobile
Multilingual speakers (2 to 3 languages)	Roon, Roswar, Ambumi	Less mobile
Becoming monolingual	Tandia, Dusner	Stable
Monolingual	Wandamen	Stable

The arrival of Malay which then became Papuan Malay in late 1800s changed the nature of multilingualism in the Wondama Bay area. Massive use of Papuan Malay as the lingua franca results in speaking more than one language by the native speakers of all languages in that area. It results all languages add one more language. Today, Papuan Malay is the most dominant language over Wandamen and other languages. It replaces Wandamen as the most dominant lingua franca. Wandamen is now the second lingua franca. Speakers of Tandia and Dusner are two small languages that are undergoing massive shift to speakers of Wandamen and Papuan Malay. Their languages now have no active speakers and is expected to be extinct in near future. The current language patterns in Wondama Bay is as in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Language patterns in the Wondama Bay area in which complexity of multilingualism can be predicated**

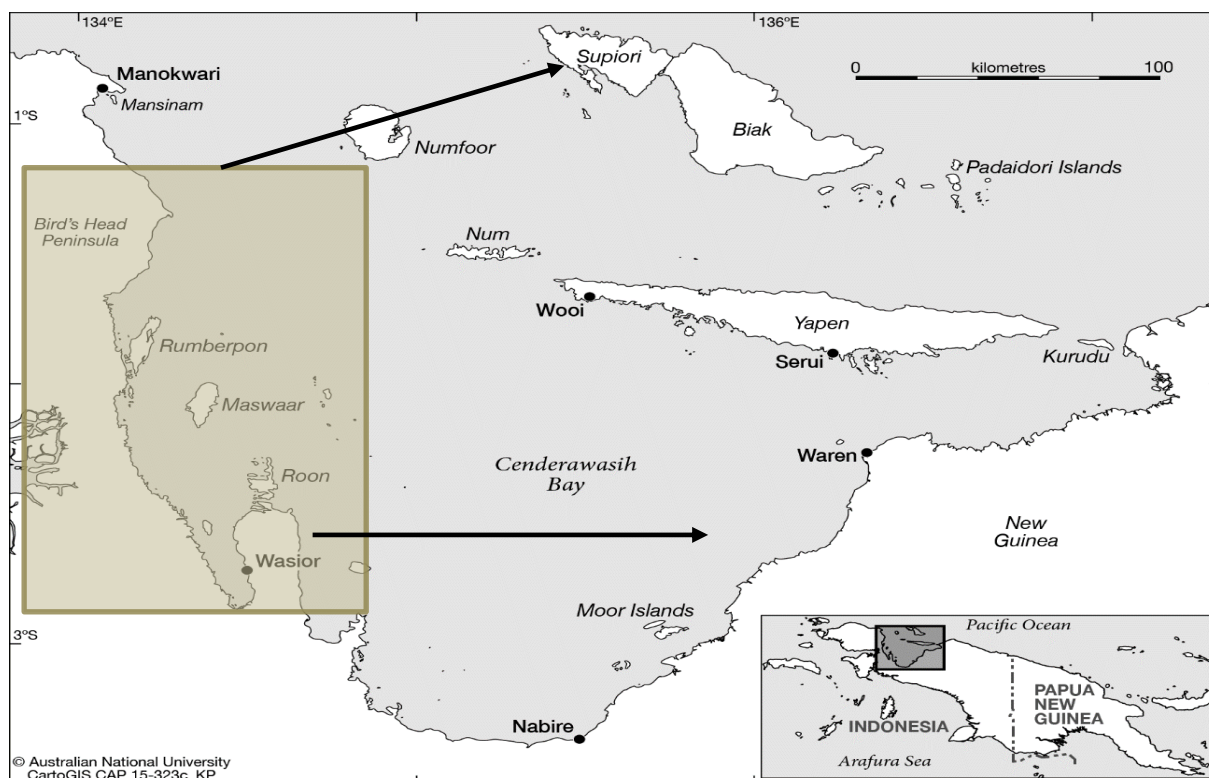
Figure 1 shows that multilingualism is a complex phenomenon. On one hand, the language patterns create dominant language(s) – Papuan Malay and Wandamen as lingua franca. On the other hand, it also creates more multilingual communities to speakers of languages such as Miere, Mairasi, Kuri, Ambumi, Roon and Roswar. The domination of the dominant language(s) then also create(s) language endangerment as Tandia and Dusner is undergoing language shift to Papuan Malay and Wandamen and their own languages lose their speakers and are severely endangered.

To sum up, more languages spoken in the area does not only mean that such a situation will create multilingualism – speaking more and more languages. Multilingualism can also contribute to the language shift situation where people tend to speak another language rather than their own. Multilingualism can also contribute to the linguistic power in which one language is more dominant than others (Heller & Aneta, 2010, p. 73) and will force a language to be endangered.

**SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL RELATIONS AMONG LANGUAGE SPEAKING COMMUNITIES IN WONDAMA BAY:**

The crucial point to study multilingualism in the Wondama Bay area is to investigate social networks and social relations among language speaking communities in the area. As a heterogeneous area in terms of its people, cultures, and languages, the social groups show a high intensity of social interactions that are supported by traditional social networks established for centuries. Traditional social networks among social groups in this region and to other social groups outside the region were highly intense. Wondama Bay is a strategic area in terms of social, economic, and politic to other social groups around Cenderawasih Bay. As a result, the movement of people from different social groups around Wondama Bay and Umar Bay to the east of Wondama Bay was intense.

There are four socio-political factors, i.e. politic, slavery, economic and modernization that influence social networks around Wondama Bay. Politically, Wandamen people who were recorded as ‘aggressive people’ tried to bring their influence toward other social groups in the area to become their ally or to join their confederation (Kamma, 1981). The influential Wondama people successfully established a political confederation known as ‘Wondama confederation’ which also link socio-cultural and economic confederation. The Wondama confederation includes the areas speaking Wandamen language today – Tandia, Dusner, Roon, Roswar, Ambumi, Kuri, Mairasi and Miere. The confederation also spreads out to Umar Bay and Yaur to the most east.



**Map 2: The location of the Wondama confederation that was established to face Biak people to the north and Waropen people to the east in Cenderawasih Bay.**

The confederation was required to face more influential people to the north – Biak people and Waropen people to the east of Cenderawasih Bay. Wondama, Biak and Waropen were the three main political confederations around Cenderawasih Bay and they contributed to the social networks built by the Wandamen people. They tried to spread their influences among people in the area. One evidence that is able to be traced down today is the spread of their languages as lingua franca. Wandamen language is used as lingua franca around Wondama Bay, the north coast area is dominated by Biak language and the east coast to the south coast uses Waropen language.

*Womi* ‘slavery’ is also another socio-political activity that contributed to social networks in the area. The practice of *womi* ‘slavery’ functioned to identify a social group among other social groups. A social group captured a *womi* ‘slave’ from another group in order to show their existence in the region therefore they have to be recognized politically, socially and culturally. This *womi* practices had existed long before the presence of any western influences. When a *womi* ‘slave’ was captured, it was the beginning of a long process of negotiation between two social groups. The negotiation skills were needed in this stage so the *womi* could be released back to his/her group. If it fails, the *womi* would never come back and would become a part of the other social group and get a new identity. The Wandamen speaking communities act as the main protagonist in the *womi* world in the region. They have a right and authority to negotiate a *womi* with other people from outside Wondama Bay such as Biak people, Waropen people or Ansumbu people of Yapen. To do so, they used Wandamen language as the language of negotiation. This places Wandamen language as a powerful language.

Economic activities were also another important factor in building social networks. Other language speaking communities linked themselves to the Wandamen speaking people because many natural resources such as timber, rattan, sago, mangroves, and shells existed in the traditional land of Wandamen people. The distributions of these natural resources gave an advantage to the Wandamen people to take control over other social groups and consciously spread their influence through economic activities. In negotiation, other social groups used Wandamen language in order to easily invoke Wandamen people to accommodate their needs.

These three main factors – political power and confederation, *womi* ‘slavery’ and economy – have resulted social networks and social relations between the Wandamen speaking communities and other language communities. As a result, many women and men from other social groups married to Wandamen people in order to become tight socio-culturally and will easily negotiate with Wandamen people. However,

intermarriage is seen as a socio-cultural subset that is produced by the main sets of socio-cultural activities mentioned above.

The history of Christianity and Dutch government that occupied the region around 1890s also contributed to the Wandamen speaking communities as a socio-cultural 'primadona.' Many important modern social resources such as schools, health centers, government offices, churches were built in the Wandamen speaking area (Kamma, 1981), (Kamma, 1982), (Kamma, 1993). The Christian missionaries and the Dutch government campaigned the important of these new social resources and required people (Wandamen speaking people and other language speaking people) to be beneficial from these resources. Many social groups were resettled down to the Wandamen speaking area. Therefore, many people from different language backgrounds then engaged intensively with Wandamen speaking people. They then gradually acquired Wandamen as the lingua franca and used the language for their daily communication in order to tighten their network with Wandamen people.

In this period, Papuan Malay was introduced massively by the Ambonese and Sanger preachers and teachers who worked for Christian missionaries and also for the Dutch Government. Thus, to access the new social resources built by the western civilization, the multilingual native Papuans around Wondama Bay were required to use Malay (then Papuan Malay) (Conroy, 2013), (Donohue & Sawaki 2007). This history is the beginning of modern era in the Wondama Bay region.

## CONCLUSION:

Complex social networks that put Wandamen speaking communities as a center of socio-cultural reign in the Wondama Bay establishes the Wandamen world in which all language speaking groups built social networks to Wandamen people and this produces Wandamen language as the lingua franca for all socio-cultural, economic and political reasons. It also produces most of the speakers of other languages to be multilingual speakers. The social mobility among people in the area also triggers the competency to speak more than one language. More mobile is one language speaking community, more language is expected to be spoken by the community. Wandamen world that then becomes the center of modernization in late 1800 also creates a sociolinguistic environment for Papuan Malay to become another lingua franca massively and gradually replaces Wandamen language.

Now, people of Wandamen world are multilingual. As multilingual speakers grow among different language groups, patterns of language use such as language shift, language switched, language mixed. These patterns of language use are typical of multilingualism. One more phenomenon that is a result of multilingualism is language endangerment. Language endangerment occurs when languages as Tandia and Dusner speakers shift to be Wandamen and Papuan Malay speakers and leave out their native language – Tandia and Dusner – to be severely endangered.

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