

## The development and spread of Malay in Papua

Today, Papuan Malay is one of the best described Malay varieties in eastern Indonesia. The last twenty years has seen significant effort go into the documentation and description of Papuan Malay, as it is spoken in northwest New Guinea (e.g., Saragih 2012, Kluge 2014, later published as Kluge 2017; Himmelmann & Riesberg 2012–2016). Despite this extensive documentation, little is certain about the origins of Papuan Malay.

The literature contains significant disagreements about the timing and mode of introduction of Malay to the island of New Guinea. On the one hand, scholars like Rowley (1972), Roosman (1982) and Paauw (2009) take the view—one I have often heard repeated—that Malay was in use for centuries along the coasts of Papua as part of regional trade networks:

Papuan Malay initially developed through contacts (in coastal areas only) with the sultanates of Tidore and Ternate in the 17th and 18th centuries, followed by trade contacts with the north Moluccans and Ambonese in the 19th century, as well as religious propagation (from Ambon and the central Moluccas) and Dutch colonial administration in the 19th and 20th centuries, and finally, Indonesian government administration, education and mass media after 1963. There appear to be regional variations due to the differing forms of the contact language which brought Malay to Papua, with the area around Cendrawasih Bay speaking a variety closer to North Moluccan Malay, and the southern Bird's Head and Bomberai peninsula speaking a variety closer to Ambon Malay. (Paauw 2009: 307)

On the other hand, Seiler (1985) examines the historical record and comes to the conclusion that almost no Malay was used along the north coast of New Guinea before the 20th century. Additionally, he shows that the Malay element in Tok Pisin is not due to trading contacts along the coasts, but originates in use of Malay by labourers in the plantations of the old German protectorate in northeast New Guinea. Kluge (2017: 42–47) offers a forceful restatement of Seiler's (1985) findings, providing more historical documentation for the lack of Malay in New Guinea throughout much of the 19th century and concluding that Malay only developed a role in Papua in the 20th century.

This paper seeks to clarify historical aspects of Malay's role as a contact language in Papua and the emergence of Papuan Malay. To date, the focus of the discussion on the history of eastern Malays has been on aspects of their grammar and highly emblematic grammatical items such as pronouns and negators (see, e.g., Collins 1980, Paauw 2009). As Malay became the preeminent vehicular language in Papua, local languages appear to have had transformative effects on the language's morphosyntax (Gil 2024). Because my concern is with the influences that contributed to the initial formation of Papuan Malay, I limit myself in this paper to looking at lexical data. Although observations are scattered throughout the literature, there has not been a systematic treatment of the distinctive lexical characteristics of Papuan Malay and the appearance of Malay borrowings in Papua with the view to analysing what these tell us about the history of Malay usage in the region.

### References

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