

The South Halmahera–West New Guinea subgroup of Austronesian: A reappraisal

1 Overview

- South Halmahera–West New Guinea (SHWNG) is a proposed subgroup of 42 Austronesian languages spoken in eastern Indonesia (see map in Figure 1)
- SHWNG languages grouped according to geographic location (ISO 639-3 codes in brackets, alternative names and dialects in parentheses):¹
 - South Halmahera (6 languages): **Buli** [bzq] (dialect: Wayamli), **Gane** [gzn] (Giman), **Maba** [mqa], **Patani** [ptn], **Sawai** [szw] (Weda), **Taba** [mky] (East Makian, Makian Dalam; dialect: Kayoa)
 - Raja Ampat (8 languages): **Ambel** [wgo] (Waigeo), **As** [asz], **Bata**, **Biga** [bhc], **Gebe** [gei], **Kawit** [xmx] (Maden, Palamul), **Matbat** [xmt], **Ma'ya** [slz] (dialects: Kawe [kgb], Laganyan [lcc], Wauyai [wuy])
 - West New Guinea (28 languages):
 - Bomberai: **Bedoanas** [bed], **Erokwanas** [erw], **Irarutu** [irh], **Kuri** [nbn] (Nabi)
 - Cenderawasih Bay: **Biak** [bhw] (dialect: Numfor), **Dusner** [dsn], **Meoswar** [mvx], **Moor** [mhz], **Roon** [rnn], **Tandia** [tni], **Umar** [gop] (Yeretuar), **Wandamen** [wad] (dialects: Windesi, Wamesa), **Waropen** [wrp], **Yaur** [jau], **Yeresiam** [ire] (Iresim)
 - Yapen Island: **Ambai** [amk] (Wadapi-Laut), **Ansus** [and], **Busami** [bsm], **Kurudu** [kjr], **Marau** [mvr], **Munggui** [mth], **Papuma** [ppm], **Pom** [pmo], **Serui-Laut** [seu], **Wabo** [wbb] (Nusari), **Wooi** [wbw]
 - Mamberamo: **Warembori** [wsa], **Yoke** [yki]
- There is no consensus on the inclusion of the Bomberai and Mamberamo languages in SHWNG

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¹Language names and status as language or dialect are drawn from recent fieldwork when possible: for Taba, Bowden (2001); for Raja Ampat, Remijsen (2001); for Bedoanas and Erokwanas, Harald Hammarström (p.c., 2010); for Irarutu and Kuri, Jason Jackson (p.c., 2010); for Moor, Umar, Yaur, and Yeresiam, my own fieldwork; for Roon, David Gil (p.c., 2010); for Warembori and Yoke, Donohue (1999). Otherwise, information is drawn from the Ethnologue (Lewis 2009).

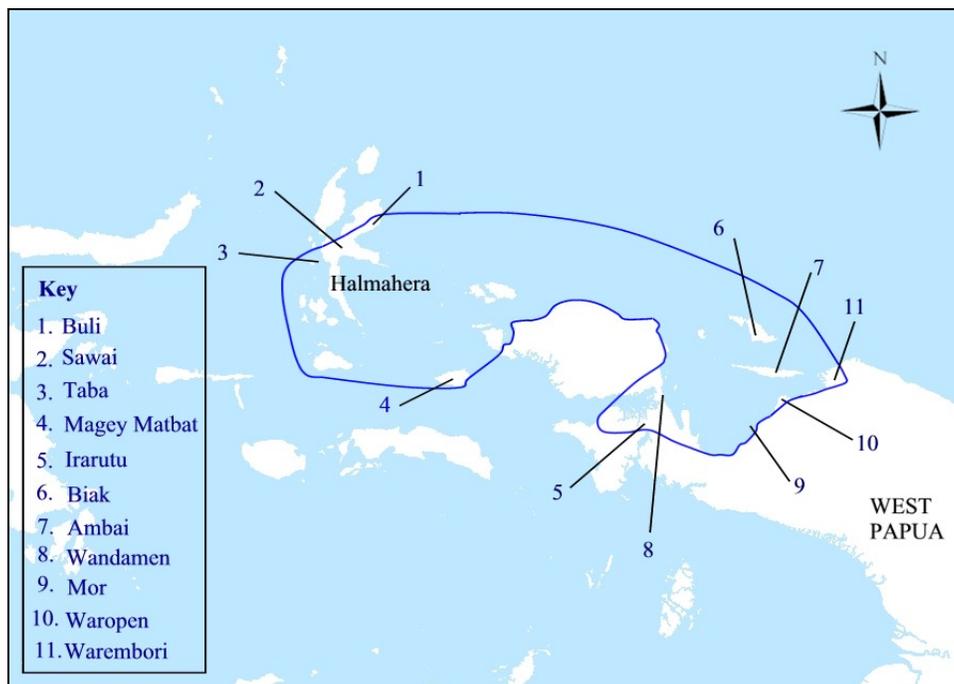


Figure 1: Map showing the location of some SHWNG languages, from van den Berg (2009:219). (Mor is a variant spelling of Moor.)

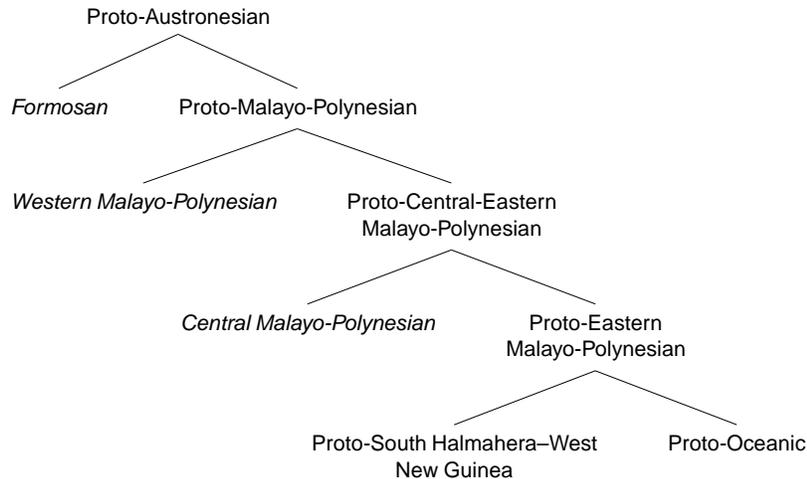


Figure 2: The higher nodes of the Austronesian family tree, after Blust (2009:724–30; 736–9). Nodes in italics are not proto-languages, but rather are cover terms for multiple primary branches.

2 SHWNG according to Blust

- Blust (1978a)² was the first attempt to put the SHWNG hypothesis on a sound empirical basis using the comparative method, i.e., on the basis of exclusively shared innovations; in most respects it has never been superseded
- Blust’s starting point for investigating the subgrouping of SHWNG languages is to show that Buli and Numfor (a dialect of Biak), despite being widely separated geographically, share a number of sound changes
- Having made a good *prima facie* case for a subgroup, he examines nearby languages to see whether they also underwent the sound changes shared by Buli and Numfor, concluding that all languages of South Halmahera, Raja Ampat, and Cenderawasih Bay underwent the following sound changes from Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP):³

2. PMP penultimate **e* became *o*
- 4b. PMP **c*, **s*, and **j*- merged as *s*
- 5a. PMP **q* and **h* were lost
- 5b. PMP **-k-* was lost
6. PMP **d*, **D*, **z*, **l*, and **r* merged as *l* or *r*
9. PMP final syllable **e* merged with **a* as *a* or *e*
12. lexically-specific vowel syncope

- The most distinctive changes from an Austronesian perspective, and therefore the most valuable as subgrouping evidence, are 2, 6, 9, and 12 (Blust 1978a:194)
- Particularly distinctive is the outcome of PMP **e* (changes 2 and 9), which “sets these languages off from all other members of the AN family, and could be taken by itself as subgrouping evidence to be reckoned with” (Blust 1978a:208)
- “perhaps the most interesting and powerful piece of evidence for a SHWNG subgroup”: the wave-style diffusion of final **k* loss and final vowel loss, whose territories overlap in a “transition area”:
 - in Gane and Taba, the westmost SHWNG languages, only final vowel loss is attested
 - in Buli (further to the east), final vowel loss preceded final **k* loss
 - in Numfor (east of Buli), final **k* loss preceded final vowel loss
 - in the eastmost languages (e.g., Waropen), only final **k* loss is attested

²Blust (1978a) is an abridged version of a much longer, unpublished paper presented at the 2ICAL conference (Blust 1978b).

³In addition to regular sound changes, Blust claims that SHWNG languages exclusively share a set of lexical innovations, semantic innovations, and irregular phonological changes. Many are not justified in detail, and they will not be considered here.

- “it is commonly believed that the diffusion of linguistic innovations is possible among dialects of the same language, but difficult or even impossible over distinct languages” (Blust 1978a:209)
- By admitting dialect differences in Proto-SHWNG, Blust is essentially admitting that some changes occurred after the breakup of the proto-language
- In other words, final **k* loss and final vowel loss are not Proto-SHWNG innovations and cannot be used as evidence for it

3 SHWNG according to Ross

- Ross (1995) independently evaluated the evidence for Proto-SHWNG, and concluded it was defined by the following phonological innovations:
 1. PMP **p* became Proto-SHWNG **f*
 2. PMP penultimate **e* became Proto-SHWNG **o*
 3. PMP initial **a-* became Proto-SHWNG **ya-*
 - 4a. PMP **t* became Proto-SHWNG **s* before **i*
 - 4b. PMP **-j-* merged with **s* as Proto-SHWNG **-s-*
 - 5a–c. PMP **k*, **q*, **h*, **H* and **ʔ* were lost
 6. PMP **d*, **z*, **l* and **r* merged as Proto-SHWNG **l*
 7. PMP **n* and **ñ* merged as Proto-SHWNG **n*
 9. PMP final syllable **e* merged with final syllable **a* as Proto-SHWNG **ə*

- “the unity of Proto-SHWNG is remarkable... [changes 2, 6, and 9] are quite striking and their occurrence in combination proves the integrity of Proto-SHWNG as a language” (Ross 1995:84–5)

4 Proto-SHWNG sound changes: the evidence from West New Guinea languages

- Blust (1978a) accepts Anceaux (1961)’s lexicostatistical classification of the West New Guinea (WNG) languages and uses it to justify citing supporting forms from a limited number of WNG languages
- Ross (1995) claims that there is a Proto-WNG node, but does not say what defines it
- Since Blust and Ross’s claimed Proto-SHWNG sound changes may have been based on unsound subgrouping assumptions about the WNG languages, I have done a preliminary re-evaluation of the evidence:
 - change 1 (**p* > **f*) is not attested in all languages, at least in final position. Examples: PMP **qinep* > Dusner *enep* ‘lie’; PCEMP **malip* > Moor *mari’a* ‘laugh’.
 - change 2 (penultimate **e* > **o*) is attested in all WNG languages to my knowledge.
 - change 3 (**a* > **ya-*) is not attested in all languages, at least if we assume that it followed loss of **q*. Examples: PMP **qaninu* > Moor *anino* ‘shadow’; PMP **qapuR* > Moor *ara* ‘lime (from coral)’; PMP **qatep* > Waropen *aka* ‘thatch’.
 - change 4a (**t* > **s* / *_ *i*) is not attested in Irarutu. Examples: PMP **bitil* > *bitər* ‘hungry’; PMP **qutin* > *ti* ‘penis’; PMP *ma-putiq* > *fut* ‘white’. It may also not be attested in Warembori (PMP **tinaqi* > *ke-tena-ro* ‘liver’), but this is complicated by the merger of **s* with **t*.⁴
 - change 4b (**-j-* > **-s-*) is hard to evaluate, since often the only reflex is from PMP **pajey* ‘rice’, which in some or all cases has been borrowed from a South Halmahera language (this would make sense, given what is known about trade networks and the arrival of rice). The Moor reflex *pasa* is clearly borrowed, since native words never have *p*.
 - change 5a (**q*, **h* > \emptyset) is attested in all WNG languages to my knowledge.
 - change 5b (**-k-* > \emptyset) is probably attested in all WNG languages, but change 5c (**k-*, **-k* > \emptyset) definitely is not. Examples are PMP **kutu* > Moor *ku’a*, Warembori *ki-ro* ‘louse’. Final **k* is usually lost in WNG, but it is known to be retained in some South Halmahera languages (PMP **manuk* > Taba *manik* ‘bird’).
 - change 6 (**d*, **D*, **z*, **l*, **r* merge) is probably attested in all WNG languages. A possible complication arises in PMP **duha* > Yaur *re-du* ‘two’, but usually **d* > *r* in Yaur.

⁴There are two possibilities: either change 4a occurred and preceded the change of **s* > *t*, or change 4a never occurred. In Moor, on the other hand, **s* > *t* and **t* > *s* / *_ *i*, but neither change fed the other.

- change 9 (final syllable **a* and **e* merge) is probably attested in all WNG languages (the data for Irarutu is not clear). The outcome is *a* in most languages, but *e* in Biak.
- change 12 (syncope): Blust (1978a:207) already mentions that this change is problematic. Among other cases that could be mentioned, it does not occur in Dusner, Moor, or Ambai. Examples are PMP **mata* > Dusner *mata/meta* ‘eye’; PMP **tinaqi* > Moor *sine*, Ambai *ene* ‘belly’; PMP **tina* > Moor/Ambai *ina* ‘mother’.
- Changes 1, 3, 4a, and 5c, included in Proto-SHWNG by Ross but not Blust, are not attested in all SHWNG languages
- Change 12, included in Proto-SHWNG by Blust but not Ross, is not attested in all SHWNG languages
- Changes 2, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6, 7 and 9 are attested in all known SHWNG languages
- Blust and Ross agree that changes 2, 6, and 9 are quite distinctive and the most relevant for defining Proto-SHWNG
- Are (these) sound changes really enough?

5 Verbal subject markers

- Morphological innovations can be more convincing than phonological innovations, if sufficiently distinctive
- Verbal subject prefixes occur in most Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian languages, but are reconstructible only at the level of Proto-Oceanic
- Now that more complete data is available for SHWNG languages, it may be possible to reconstruct a partial paradigm for Proto-SHWNG
- Illustration: Moor, Yeresiam, Yaur, and Umar verbal prefixes and clitics

	Moor	Yeresiam	Yaur	Umar
1SG	i=gw-	ne=j-	i=gw-	e-
2SG	a=gw-	a=g- <u>	a=gw-	a-/agw- <u>
3SG	j-	i=d- <i>	∅-	i-/j- <i>
1DU.IN	∅-	nok=	do’=	dit-
1DU.EX	n-	nom=	dom=	dim-
2DU	n-	um= <u>	dam=	dim- <u>
3DU	n-	uh=	doh=	dih- <i>
1TR.IN		kok=		tot-
1TR.EX		kom=		tom-
2TR		kum= <u>		tom- <u>
3TR		kuh=		toh- <i>
1PL.IN	∅-	nek=	o’=	t-
1PL.EX	n-	nem=	om=	em-
2PL	n-	am= <u>	am=	am- <u>
3PL	n-, ti=j-	ih=	oh=	ih- <i>

- Some unresolved questions:
 - What is the source of 1SG *i=*, *ne=*, and *e-*? Are they SHWNG innovations?
 - The 2SG form *a=gw-* is presumably derived from PMP **kahu* ‘2SG’, but when was the *gw-* agreement prefix grammaticalized, and why does it appear in 1SG in some languages?
 - The 2SG <u> and 3SG <i> infixes occur in Central Malayo-Polynesian as well, so they are not Proto-SHWNG innovations, but are their precise distribution and phonological properties distinctive in SHWNG?
 - Can verbal morphology be used to justify subgroups within SHWNG, e.g., Yeresiam and Umar?

6 References

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