

## Language and Power among Language Speaking Communities in North of Papua, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*The article aims at describing the interrelated factors between language and power among language speaking communities in Papua, Indonesia. It focuses on the connection between language use and unequal relation among language speaking communities in West Papua, Indonesia, especially among Biak, Wandamen and Waropen speaking groups and other small-size speech communities. In terms of ecology of language in Papua, the diverse linguistic situation is equal to the diversity of language speech communities in different ecological environment. Besides, the diversity of languages is also contributed by the diversity of non-linguistic factors such as imbalances in economic, social, politic, and cultural powers. This condition creates unequal power among language speaking communities living closed to each other that has a connection to language use. Language use provides evidence between language and power between more dominant speech communities and less dominant ones. Thus, this creates sociolinguistic phenomena such as multilingualism, lingua franca, language shift, and language endangerment.*

**Keywords:** Language and power, language use, non-linguistic factors, language speaking community, Papua, Indonesia.

### INTRODUCTION:

Language may not be just defined as a linguistic phenomenon, but it can be also defined as a social behavior or social activity in which a language speaking community used to express their social identity and social status (Krauss and Chiu 1998; Fairclough 1989; Bourdieu 1991; Sawaki and Arwam 2018). As to express social behavior and social status, language also captures social and cultural phenomena such as race, ethnic, gender, political power, colonialization, and others. Especially, in areas in which many languages are spoken, there is a competition among language speaking communities to become influential when they are recognized and acknowledged socially. A language speaking community will use its power to influence other language speaking communities. Among other powerful social instruments to identify social power, language may be seen as the main social behavior that indicate such a social power of a social group. Power is defined as social stratification that is used to influence social groups to fulfill many social objectives. Language is defined as social activity to symbolize the power.

Studying language and power must be seen from multi-discipline studies. The manifestation of power through language derives from how language represents social relation and social practices in any kind (Thomas and Linda 1999): the relation between language and politics (Wodak 2018), language and social behavior (Krauss and Chiu, 1998), language and political power (Ribes-Inesta 2006); and language and religion (Landina, et.al 2011). Power can be manifested through languages in these social domains created by other factors such as economic, politic, culture, religion, and others.

Many social groups in the world exercise their existential power through languages. In this exercise,

language is just a medium to represent a social, political, economic, or cultural power possessed by a social group. Dutch, for instance, was a language of communication in Indonesia when Indonesia was still under the Dutch rule before 1945. The political power established by the Dutch colonial government was represented by its language use. In Papua, Malay became a lingua franca since early 1900s because of Christianity. Malay was argued to be the most powerful language in the church and other languages were forbidden in the Christian practices. These facts shows that language manifests any kinds of power in a society or across societies. Alongside, trading also contributes to the power of Malay language especially in region and politic.

This paper aims at describing language and power practiced in traditional Melanesian societies of north coast of Papua, Indonesia. Some old societies in this region manifested their power through the spreading of their languages to other social groups that are reflected by the presence of lingua francas, multilingualism, language shift, and language endangerment.

### **Sociolinguistic Context in the old Papua World:**

The Papua region (Western Half of New Guinea) is one of the most linguistically diverse region in the world. There are about three hundreds distinct languages and/or dialects spoken by mostly small speech communities in this region. Each speech community may speak a language or dialect that is totally different from its neighbouring speech communities. Although, the number of languages spoken in this region is so high, most languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers. Even, many of them have fewer than 100, some even fewer than 50 speakers (Foley, 2000).

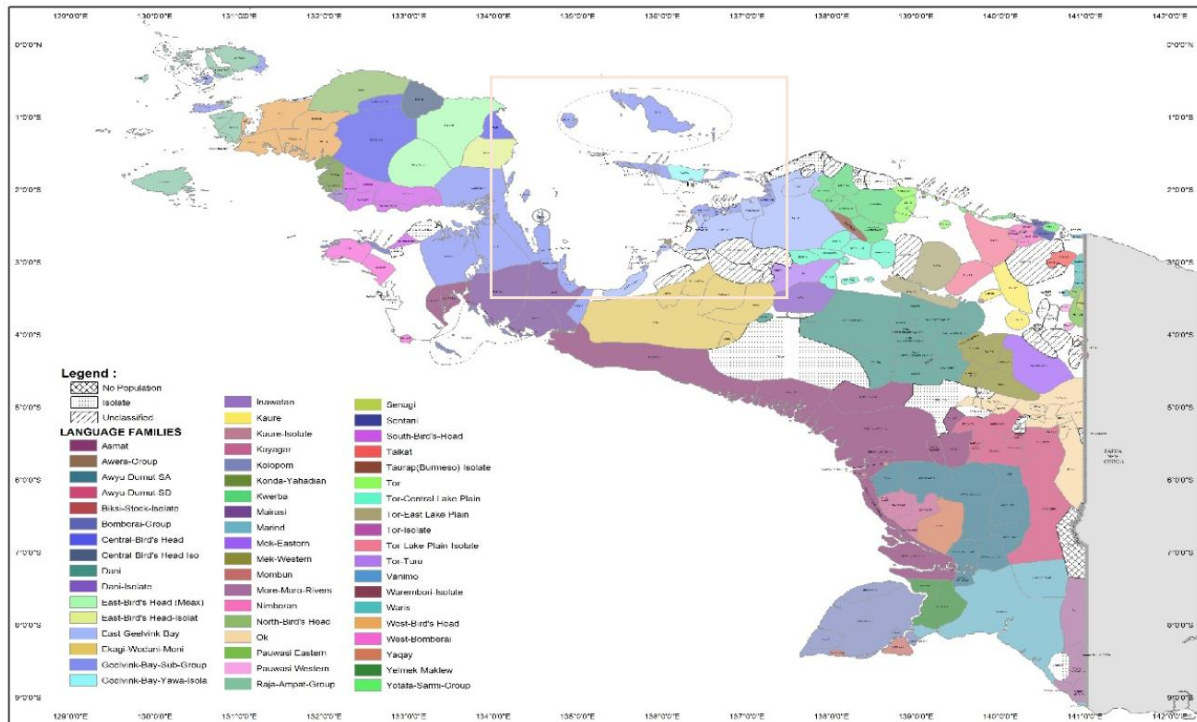


**Map 1: Islands of Indonesia figuring the Papua region**

Languages spoken by speech communities around north coast of Papua reflect this sociolinguistic context. Biak, Waropen, Ansus, Wandamen are among speech communities that have quite large language communities. Biak has about 30,000 speakers, Waropen (15,000), Wandamen (7,000), Ansus (3,000). Most other languages only have less than 2,000 speakers such as Moor ( $\pm 2,000$ ) (Gil, 2010), Pom ( $\pm 1,000$ ), Marau ( $\pm 700$ ), Yaur ( $\pm 700$ ), Maya ( $\pm 1,500$ ) (Remijsen, 2002), Matbat ( $\pm 500$ ) (Remijsen, 2002), Tandia ( $\pm 8$ ) (Sawaki, 2017), Dusner (3) (Darlymple & Mofu 2012).

The small size of many speech communities has led to the establishment of multilingualism among multilingual speech communities (Sawaki, 2017; Foley, 2000). Multilingualism in this region may be seen from two levels – macro and micro levels. In the macro level, multilingualism represents the region with many individual speech communities that contribute to the diversity of languages in the region. In the micro level, multilingualism is a manifestation of different social relations and social networks built among multilingual speech communities in the region that contribute to the establishment of multilingual speakers within each speech community. Although each speech community is socially and culturally independent in

their own traditional territories, each of them establishes social relations and build their social networks among them (see Stasch, 2009 and Sawaki & Arwam 2018). Many reasons contribute to the establishment of social relations and social networks including trading, social, cultural, political and religious reasons. This will be further described later in this paper. As a result, multilingualism becomes a fundamental feature among speech communities in this region.



**Map 2: Linguistic situation figuring sociolinguistic context in north coast of Papua around Cenderawasih Bay (SIL 2004)**

Multilingualism, in social perspective, represents a highly systematic, well-order societies, and a well organized social relation and social network reflecting through different language use. Speech communities in northern coast of Papua, Indonesia build social relations and social networks with well-organised social systems and social structures. They create new social systems or social structures to accommodate the relations or networks they build with other speech communities. Trading relation, for instance, has created a new social and cultural system of paying dowry with porcelains among people in Cenderawasih Bay area. Until today, multilingual communities in this area are still practising this new tradition. In the political world, some speech communities are more dominant than others and their political influences are reflected in others' cultural practices including language use. Language-use also goes along with other social and cultural practices that reflects lingua franca, language shift, language –mixed, -switched, and language endangerment phenomena.

**Social Power in the old Papua World:**

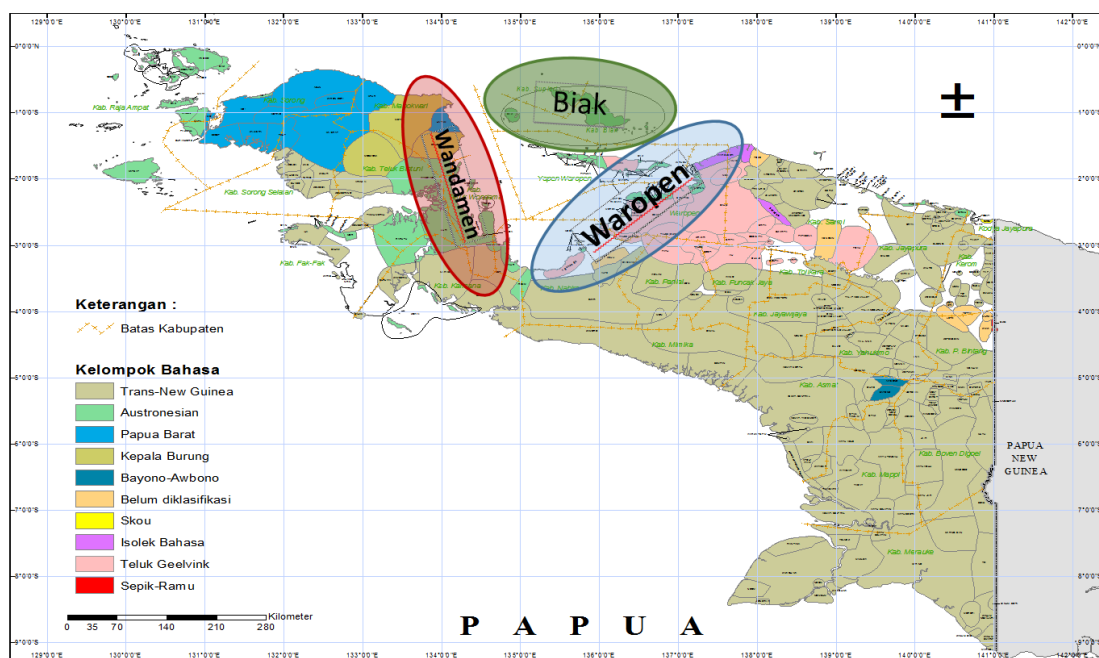
In the traditional Melanesian world in the northern coast of Papua, there are several speech communities that are politically considered strong and have influential power among small size speech communities in the region. They establish themselves as powerful political actors towards other surrounding societies and compete to bring their influences to others. Out of hundreds speech communities, there are three main powerful social groups in the traditional Melanesian world stretching from Mamberamo River to the east to the Raja Ampat Archipelago to the west. They are Biak, Waropen and Wandamen social groups. However, there are also few small size communities that were also influential in some small areas. However, this study focuses on the major political influence and language use of Biak, Waropen and Wandamen in the north coast of Papua.

Biak is an Austronesian language speaking community living mainly in the Islands of Biak and Numfor, in the north coast of Papua, Indonesia. The population of Biak language speaking community is around 30,000 thousands. In addition, thousands of Biak speaking people, whether the first language speakers or second

language speakers, are also spread out and settled in different regions in the north coast of Papua stretching from Raja Ampat Archipelago to the west to Mamberamo River to the east.

Waropen is also another Austronesian language speaking community occupying the east coast of Cenderawasih Bay in the north coast of Papua. The Waropen language speaking community lives in hundreds villages stretching from the west of Mamberamo River to the east to the Wapoga River, near Nabire regency to the west. Many first language speakers and second language speakers live outside the main Waropen speaking area, mainly stretching to the west from Makimi River in the Nabire Regency to Ambumi village in the Wondama Bay to the west. The total population of Waropen speaking people is about 15,000 speakers.

Wandamen is also an Austronesian language speaking community living to the west of Cenderawasih Bay, in Wondama Bay. They occupy several villages around the Wondama Bay. The total number of its speakers is about 7,000 people whether as first language speakers or second language speakers.



**Map 2: Language groups in Papua figuring language speaking community of Biak, Waropen and Wandamen (SIL 2004)**

Biak, Waropen and Wandamen are the most influential traditional social groups in the north coast of Papua. There are several factors that contribute to their influential power: economic, social, cultural and political factors. The social groups were economically very influential. They mostly have traditional rights towards seas, coastlines, wetlands and rivers in their territories, especially Waropen and Wandamen social groups. All natural resources that are economically needed by other surrounded small-size social groups are in the three influential groups' land and sea traditional territories. Thus, many small-size communities depend their life on the three big groups in order to access such natural resources. Thus, Waropen and Wandamen established an inter-dependent relation, i.e. superior-inferior relation, between them and surrounding small-size communities. The needs upon fresh water for daily need, sago plantation for food, timbers for building houses which are supplied from Waropen and Wandamen lands make them powerful in the economic sector. Biak joins the Waropen and Wandamen groups to form the most powerful economic groups. The traders of Biak, Waropen and Wandamen were among the first Papuan traders that established a trading linkage to outside traders such as Malay, Chinese and Western traders. They controlled the local markets in the Cenderawasih Bay and the Bird's Head areas for modern goods such as steel axes, porcelains, salts, clothes, money, etc (See [Kamma, 1981](#) & [Conroy 2013](#)). By having well-established connection to outsider traders, they bought or exchanged materials and then they sold them again to the local Melanesian communities. They created an economic monopoly and dependency among local Papuan traders and the communities. Thus, in old trading world in the north New Guinea area, the well-known Biak language and then Waropen and Wandamen languages were used as trading languages. All multilingual traders must use either of these languages in trading activities.



In social context, these three big groups built very strong social networks among communities in the areas and beyond. Among other social groups in Papua which live in the multicultural and multilingual region, Biak, Waropen and Wandamen created high intensity of social interactions and social networks towards small-size communities that culturally associate with them. For instance, the Wondama Bay area, where the Wandamen speaking group is a dominant group, is a strategic area in terms of social, economic, and politic. It is therefore other small-size communities in the area built a strong relation to the Wandamen speaking community. Kinship relations through intermarriage and other social relations are very strong. Thus, many family names are found cross-speech communities, such as the Wandamen family name *Marani*, *Imburi*, and *Samberi* which are also found among people in Tandia and Dusner social groups.

It is also true for Biak and Waropen communities. Biak built a very strong social network with people in the north of Yapen Island, an island to the south of Biak Island. Several Biak villages settled by people of Biak descendants are found in the north and west of Yapen such as Saubeba, Tindaret, Waindu, Kanaki. They still bring their Biak names such as Mambrasar, Rumbiak, Bukorpioper, Rumsano, and others. Biak people and culture have vary strong influence as far as Raja Ampat region to the west where different Biak sub-groups such as Beteu, Wardo, Usba, Kafdaron, and Numfor live there, and in the Mamberamo River area to the east. In these areas, Biak language is strongly used as the lingua franca.

Waropen, in the east coast of Cenderawasih Bay, also built their social relations to some small-size communities in the east coast of Cenderawasih Bay to people in Tamakuri, Barapasi, Botawa, Wapoga through kinship relations and intermarriage. For instance, the Waropen family name *Sawaki* of Nubuai is also found in Tamakuri and Barapasi to the east of the bay as *Awaki*. The influence of Waropen people are also found among communities in Napan-Wainami to the south east of Cenderawih Bay and Ambumi village to the west of Cenderawasih Bay, where the Waropen names such as Sawaki, Erari, Ayomi, and Refasi are also found (see [Held, 1955](#)). In these areas, Waropen language is used as a lingua franca.

In the cultural life, social networks among Biak, Waropen, Wandamen were built with a shared beliefs and legends. The well-known traditional religion Koreri, a messianic cult religion, which based on the Biak traditional religion, are shared and practiced by most communities in the north coast of Papua stretching from Biak and Yapen to the Raja Ampat area in the west. In addition, Kuri-Pasai legend that builds a traditional religion known in Waropen as Sera Dor 'Almighty God' is well-known practical belief among Wandamen and Waropen. The associate small-communities around Wandamen and Waropen also practice these beliefs.

Another cultural practice was *womi* 'slavery'. *Womi* is a common cultural practice among language speaking communities around Cenderawasih Bay and the Bird's Head of New Guinea. This slavery practice requires small traditional communities around Cenderawasih Bay to build social and cultural confederations with the three big groups, Biak, Wandamen and Waropen. The confederations aim at building strong cultural, social and political associations for trading and exchanging slaveries. All social and cultural systems associated to the slavery practices are built within the confederation and cross-confederations and the systems are dominated by Biak, Wandamen and Waropen groups ([Sawaki, 2016](#) and [Sawaki & Arwam 2018](#)).

The cultural confederation is also an instrument for the traditional communities to have a political influence. Thus, Biak, Wandamen and Waropen play their significant influences to attract small-size communities to attach to each confederation. For a practical reason, the confederations are called Biak confederation, Wandamen confederation, and Waropen Confederation. Other small-size communities that join Biak confederation are distributed along north coast, north Bird's Head of New Guinea and Raja Ampat archipelago. Wandamen confederation occupies most communities in the west of Cenderawasih Bay around Wondama Bay. Waropen confederation includes all small communities to the east coast of Cenderawasih Bay.

### **Language Use: Power and Domination of Biak, Wandamen and Waropen Languages:**

As described, in demonstrating their powerful influences among small-size communities in north coast of Papua, Biak, Wandamen and Waropen languages were used in most domains of life among small-size communities. The reflections of language power and domination of these three major languages are through the practices of multilingualism, diglossia, and lingua franca among different language speaking communities in the area. In understanding these language practices, I preferably describe them in accordance to the individual language practice:

**Biak Language:**

Biak may be the most well described language among other indigenous languages in Papua (Kamma 1981; Heuvel, 2006; Mofu, 2008). The language is politically well-known to other small-size speech communities around north coast of Papua area stretching from Mamberamo River to the east to Raja Ampat to the west. It has become an influential language in trading since the beginning of the eighteenth century when Biak people first resettled in different places in the north coast of Papua (see Heuvel, 2006: 2). They become well-known Papuan traders that connect New Guinea and outsiders, especially with Ternate and Tidore Kingdoms (see Kamma, 1983). In doing so, Biak people resettled in different places in north coast of Papua and this contributed to the spreading of Biak language in the area. Since then, the presence of Biak people and their language became strong and the language is used as lingua franca, a language for communication, in social, economic and politic relations by different small-size speech communities such as Onate speaking community in north coast of Yapen Island in the villages such as Wamsa, Saubeba, Sambrawai, Artaneng, Rosbori, and Asai; Hatam and Mansim speaking communities in Manokwari in the villages such as Andai, Maripi, Tanah Rubuh, and Oransbari); Mpur, Abun and Mooi speaking communities in north coast of Bird’s Head in the villages such as Saubeba, Saukoram, Amberbaken, Waibem, Koor, Sausapor, Makbon, Sorong; and Maya, Ambel, Batanta in Raja Ampat Islands in the Islands of Waigeo, Ayau, Batanta, Pam, Kofiau, Mios Manggara, and Mainyafun. It may be the first language used for trading before Malay (then Papuan Malay) came to the existence in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The people of these areas are multilingual speakers of which Biak is the lingua franca.



**Map 3: The spreading areas of Biak (red line), Wandamen (blue line), and Waropen (yellow line) languages used as lingua franca.**

**Wandamen:**

Wandamen is a language speaking group living in the western part of Cenderawasih Bay around Wondama Bay. The language group is also known as Wondama, Wamesa, Windesi (Gasser, 2014). Long before Christianity and western colonization occupy the area, Wandamen people are known as ‘aggressive’ people who spread their political influence among small size speech communities in the western part of Cenderawasih Bay (Kamma 1983). In the period, they politically form a ‘political confederation’ among language groups such as Ambumi and Dusner to the west side of the Wondama bay, Roon and Meoswar in the surround islands, Tandia to the south of the bay, the highland people of Sougb to the north and Yaur

and Goni people to the east of the bay. Among these language speaking groups, Wandamen language is used as the lingua franca. Communication built to fulfill their political, social, cultural and economic needs across language communities is used with speaking Wandamen language. Speaking Wandamen language in Christian and western colonization era is also crucial in order to take advantages of all opportunities offered by the Christian Missionaries and the Dutch Government which were at the time focus their services among Wandamen speaking area. All Dutch administration offices, schools, and missionaries headquarter were built around Mieï and Wasior villages which are the Wandamen speaking villages. Thus, people who are from different language backgrounds other than Wandamen must speak Wandamen to access to the area. Education is one of the major contributions to the spread of Wandamen language and culture. Students from different linguistic backgrounds in West New Guinea (currently Papua) came to study in Mieï and Wasior. The boarding schools of different levels were built there to accommodate students from different regions. Students then have opportunities to communicate with the Wandamen speaking people and establish the language as the lingua franca.

In cultural context, Wandamen language is used as a language of negotiation in the 'slavery practice' among language speaking communities in the region and beyond the region. People as far as north coast of New Guinea and the Southern part of Cenderawasih Bay around Nabire region use Wandamen as language of communication in slavery negotiation or they request Wandamen people to negotiate the slavery for them. In a broader economic context, Wandamen speaking people together with Biak people are built economic and trading monopoly of which they brought economic goods from Molucca islands and sold them to their neighboring people. In doing so, they use Wandamen as the language of trading to their multilingual confederation around Wondama Bay.

#### **Waropen:**

As Biak and Wandamen languages, Waropen language is used widely along the eastern coast to southern coast of Cenderawasih Bay, Papua as a language of communication, especially in trading and social network contexts (Held, 1942). Other small-size language communities in the eastern and southern coast of Cenderawasih Bay are forced to speak Waropen because the Waropen speaking communities spreading within sub-groups, i.e Waropen Ronari, Waropen Kai dan Waropen Ambuni occupy all natural resources and trading goods. Small-size communities, especially they are in the inland area must speak Waropen in order to access all the resources.

Waropen traders are among influential traders from Biak and Wandamen and some from Ansum in the old Papua world that play a domination in the trading access with outsider traders from Moluccas Islands. They travel to Ternate and Tidore kingdoms to buy modern goods such as steel axes, salts, clothes, porcelains, and others to trade the materials to their Papuan neighbors. To do so, Waropen language must be used.

Waropen people are also among dominant ethnic groups in the Cenderawasih Bay that apply the traditional slavery practice among multi-lingual communities in the area. Waropen warriors are well-known as slave hunters and slave traders in Cenderawasih Bay. They trade slaves as far as Wandamen speaking are to the west and Mamberamo river to the east. In doing so, Waropen language is used as in negotiation of slaves (Held, 1955).

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Biak, Wandamen and Waropen are considered powerful language speaking communities in the old Papuan world. Their languages are used almost by small-size language speaking communities around Cenderawasih Bay. This symbolizes their political, social, culture and economic powers that dominate other language speaking communities. The access to all political, social, culture and economic resources must be channeled by Biak, Wandamen and/or Waropen languages. The access to outsider world and modern goods in the trading world must be negotiated through Biak, Wandamen and Waropen languages. This sociolinguistic context creates many linguistic phenomena such as multilingualism, lingua franca, dominant and less-dominant languages, language shift and switch, and language endangerment.

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