

# The Genealogical Affiliation of the Western Torres Language

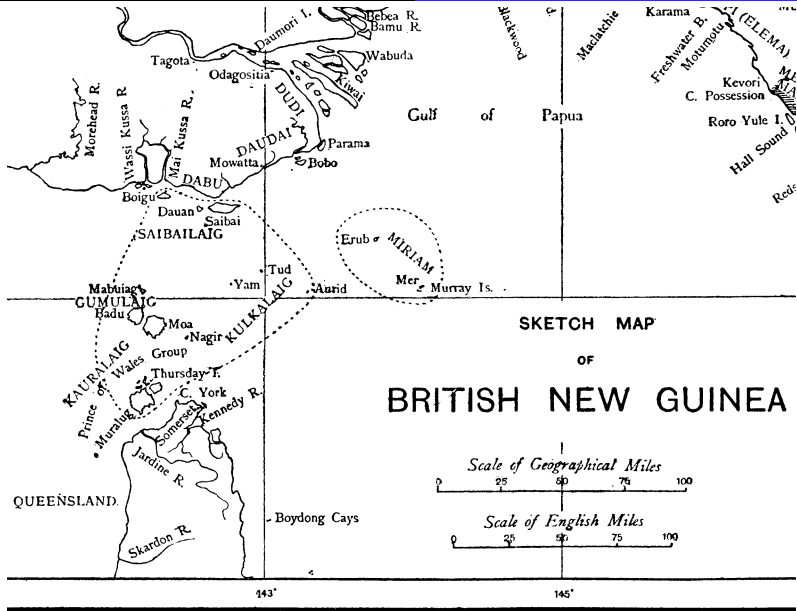
Barry Alpher, Geoffrey O'Grady and Claire Bown  
barryalpher@yahoo.com, bowern@rice.edu

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# Part I

## Background

- ▶ Western Torres Strait Language (Kala Lagaw Ya, Kala Kawaw Ya and other varieties)
- ▶ Eastern Torres Strait – Meryam Mir (clearly Eastern Trans-Fly; Papuan)



# WTS: Papuan or Australian?

- ▶ Ray (1897:16): Papuo-Australian. (that is, Papuan with Australian features)
- ▶ Ray (1907: 267-8): comparison with Guugu Yimidhirr (Australian with Papuan features)
- ▶ O'Grady et al (1966); Pama-Nyungan.
- ▶ Dixon (2002): It's not Australian, it's Papuan with a strong Pama-Nyungan adstrate.
- ▶ Evans (2005): ... but it's got Pama-Nyungan pronouns.

Here we review the evidence for WTS' Pama-Nyungan status.

- ▶ ETS: Meryam Mir (Papuan, Eastern Trans-Fly); related to languages on mainland PNG;
- ▶ Area of cultural contact, Torres Strait Islanders define themselves as distinct (and separate from Aboriginal Australians)
- ▶ Claims for intense contact, although preliminary work didn't reveal the sort of obvious and pervasive borrowing that characterises, for example, Arnhem Land.

## Part II

# Grammatical Evidence

## First person singular

	KLY	KKY	pPNy (Alpher)
Nom	ngay	ngay	*ngayu
Erg	ngath	ngath	*ngacu
Acc	ngoena	ngoena	*ngaña
Dat	ngayka ~ ngaykika	ngayapa	*ngayku/a (KLY)

\*ñ > n (supported by lexical reconstructions).

## Other pronouns

	KLY	KKY	pPNy
1dl.incl	ngaba	ngoeba	*ngampula
1pl.incl	ngalbay	ngalpa	*ngali- (dl)
2sg	ni	ngi	*ñin/ñun
2dl	nipel	ngipel	*ñupal(a)/*ñipal(a)
3sg.Masc	nuy	nuy	*ñu-
3sg.Fem	na	na	*ña-
3dl	palay	palay	*pula, pala
3pl	thana	thana	*cana
3pl-obl	thanam-	thanam-	*canam-

(Supporting sound correspondences are attested.)

(KLY)

-ngul	Yesterday Past	<i>ngula</i> widespread as adverbial 'and then'
-nu	Near Past (N Conj):	cf WT <i>baganu</i> 'speared, pierced' e.g. Warlpiri <i>pakarnu</i> 'hit (Past)';
-ma	Near Past (Ø Conj):	<i>mulima</i> 'talked'; cf Nonpast forms in m(V) (Warlpiri <i>nyinami</i> , Koko-Bera <i>nyiném</i> ~ <i>nyinvm</i> ).
-n	Present (N, Ø Conj n.sg)	e.g. <i>bagan</i> 'spears';
-k	Future	- <i>ayk</i> in N Conj non-Dual; - <i>ka</i> elsewhere; e.g. <i>mulika</i> 'will talk'; cf. Purposive forms in - <i>ku</i> such as Watjarri <i>nyinaku</i> (~ <i>nyinawu</i> )

**KLY:**

Transitive

patha

paga

Intransitive

pathe/i

page

'chop'

'spear, pierce [etc]'

**Kuuk-Thaayorre:**

Active

katpr, katparr

pathr, patharr

Reflexive

katpe, katpe(y)r

pathe, pathe(y)r

'grasp'

'bite'

- ▶ Also found elsewhere.

## Presence of “Pama-Nyungan” vocabulary:

- ▶ *ngurrsi* ‘snot’ < \*ngurrci
- ▶ *wati* ‘bad’ < \*wati
- ▶ *la:ga* ‘place’ < \*Ra:ku
- ▶ *mari* ‘ghost’ < \*mari
- ▶ *dha:ng(a)* ‘tooth, edge’ < \*ca:nga
- ▶ *sib* ‘liver’ < \*cipa

# Too many correspondences!

- ▶ \*k:k, g, ø
- ▶ variable initial dropping.
- ▶ variable voicing reflexes.
- ▶ uncertainty about vowel length.

## Part III

# Conclusions

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- ▶ WTS is Pama-Nyungan.
- ▶ The classification is well supported using the usual diagnostic criteria.
- ▶ However, there are still plenty of problems to keep us going.