



Linguistic Diversity of Vanuatu

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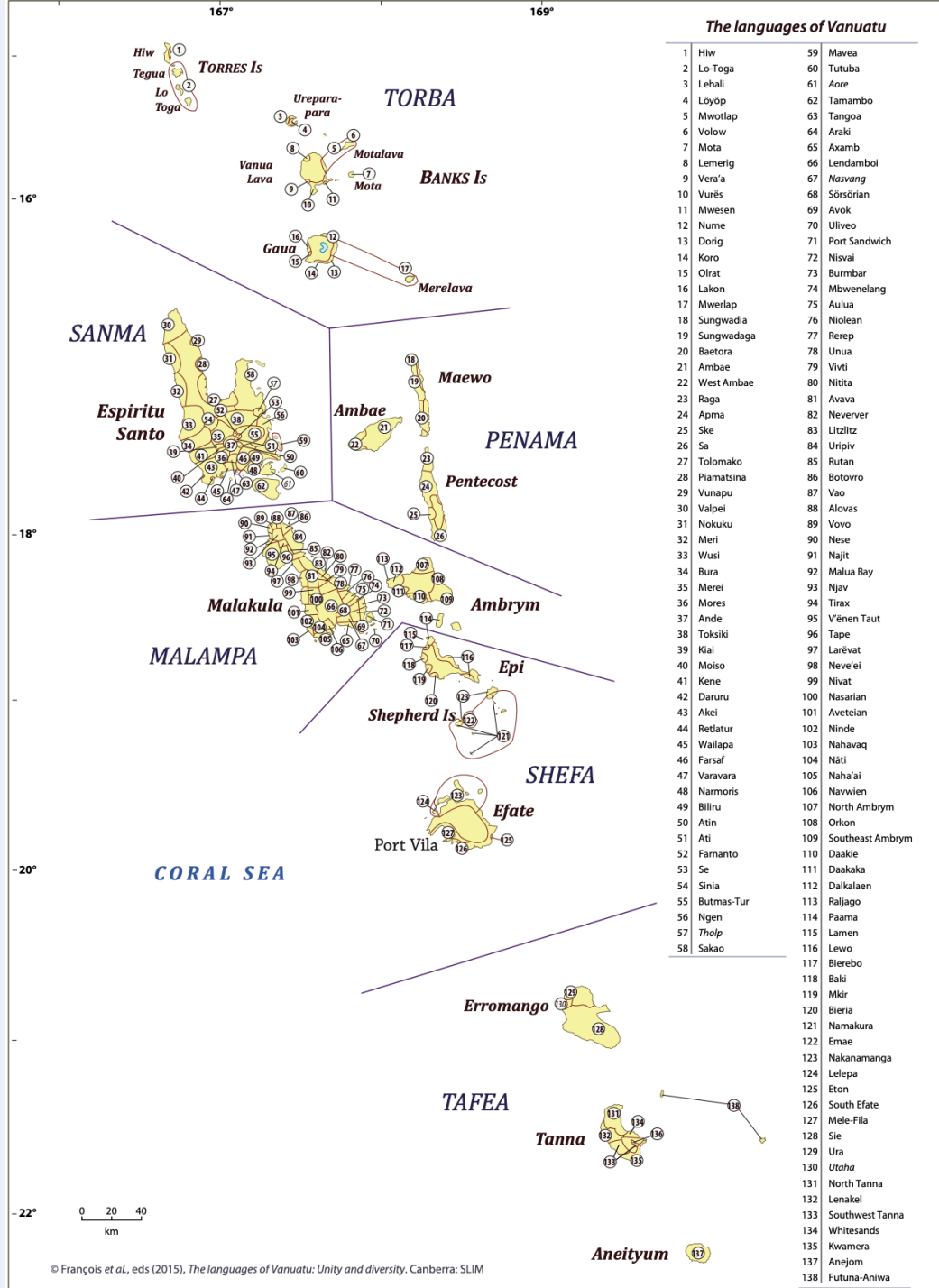
Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History

Vaupés to Vanuatu

May 15, 2019

Diversity: Number

- 145 languages
- “Language”:
 - mutual intelligibility
 - speaker’s perceptions
 - assessments of lexical, phonological, & syntactic distance



- “Small” languages
- Spoken by less than 10,000 speakers per language

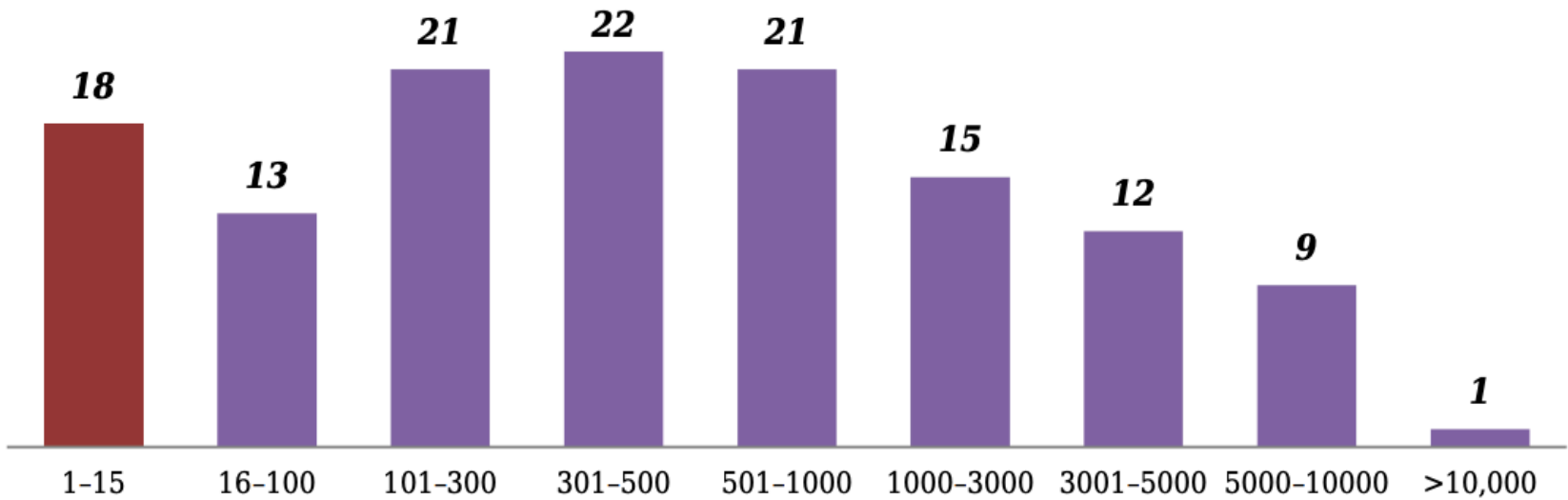
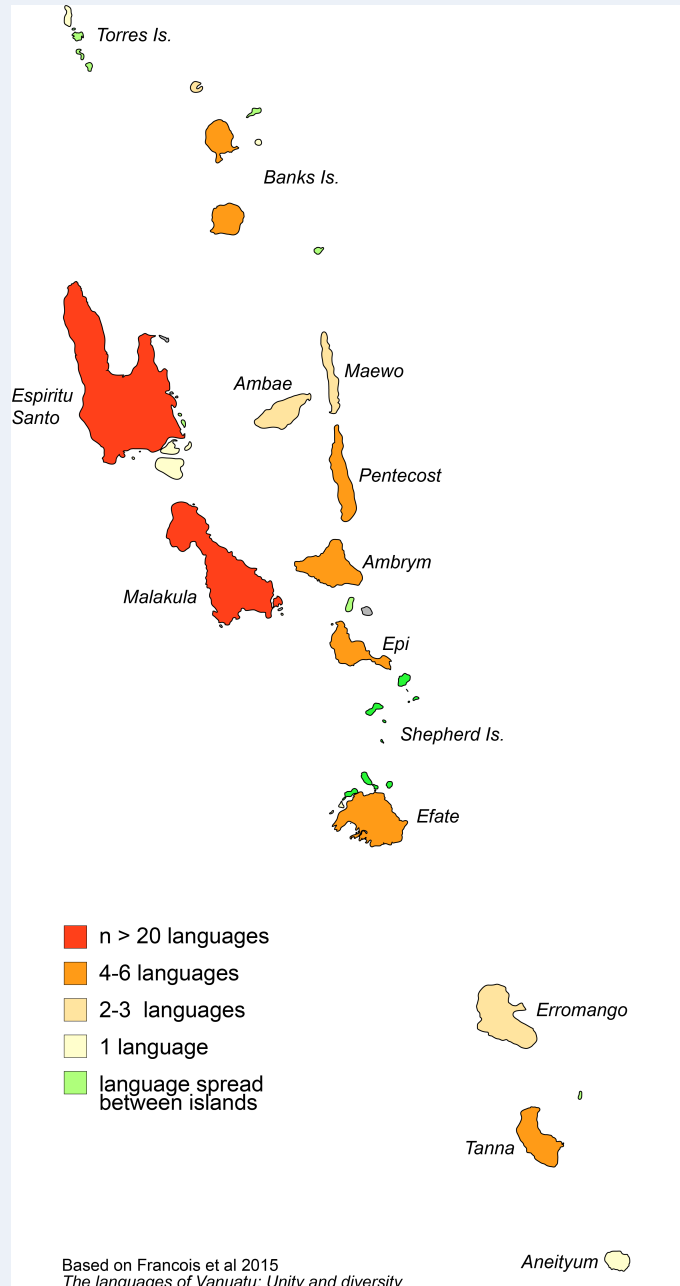


Figure 3 — The size of speech communities in Vanuatu (in number of speakers)

Diversity: Density

- Most linguistically diverse place on earth per capita (François et al. 2015; Posth et al. 2018)
- 145 languages spoken by a population of less than 300,000
- Avg. of 88 sq. km per language
- “Densest linguistic landscape in the world” (François et al. 2015)

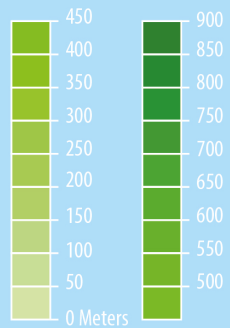


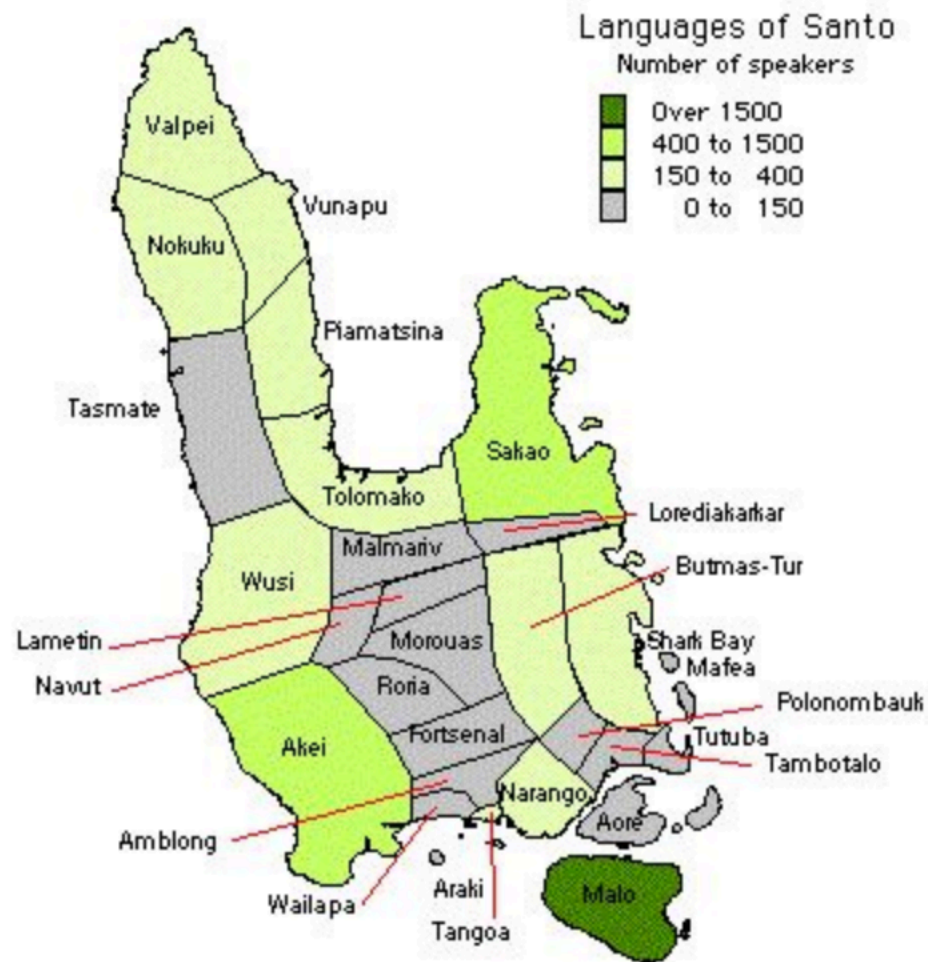
Diversity: Density

- Heavily linguistically populated:
 - Malekula
 - Santo
- Some languages:
 - Pentecost
 - Maewo
 - Epi
 - Ambrym
- One-island, one-language
 - Torres Is.
 - Aneityum

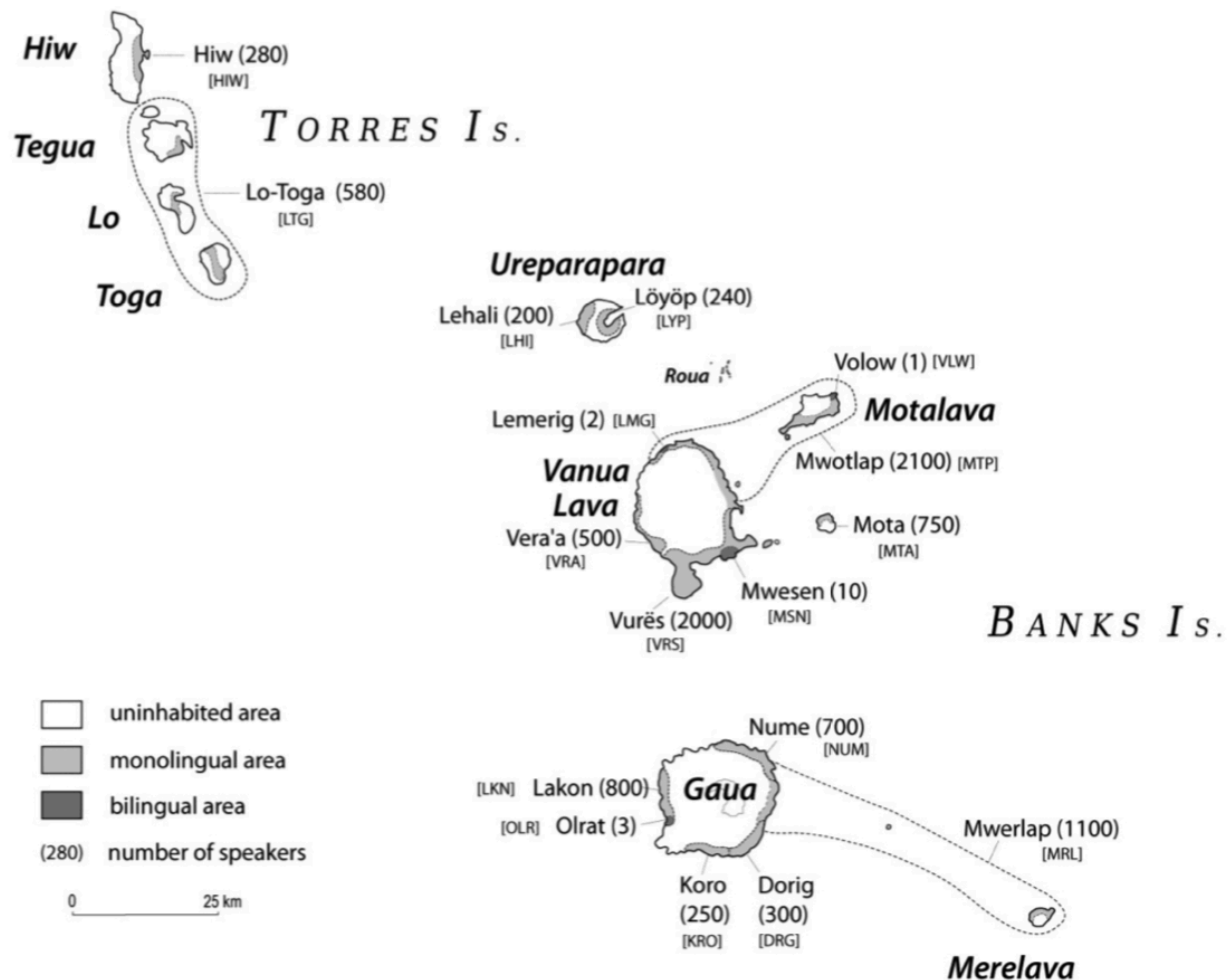
Malekula Vanuatu

indigenous language regions

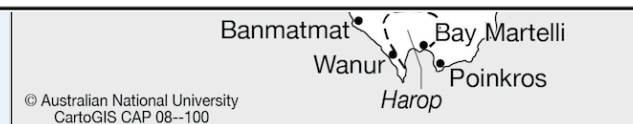




(Thieberger 2010)



(François 2011)

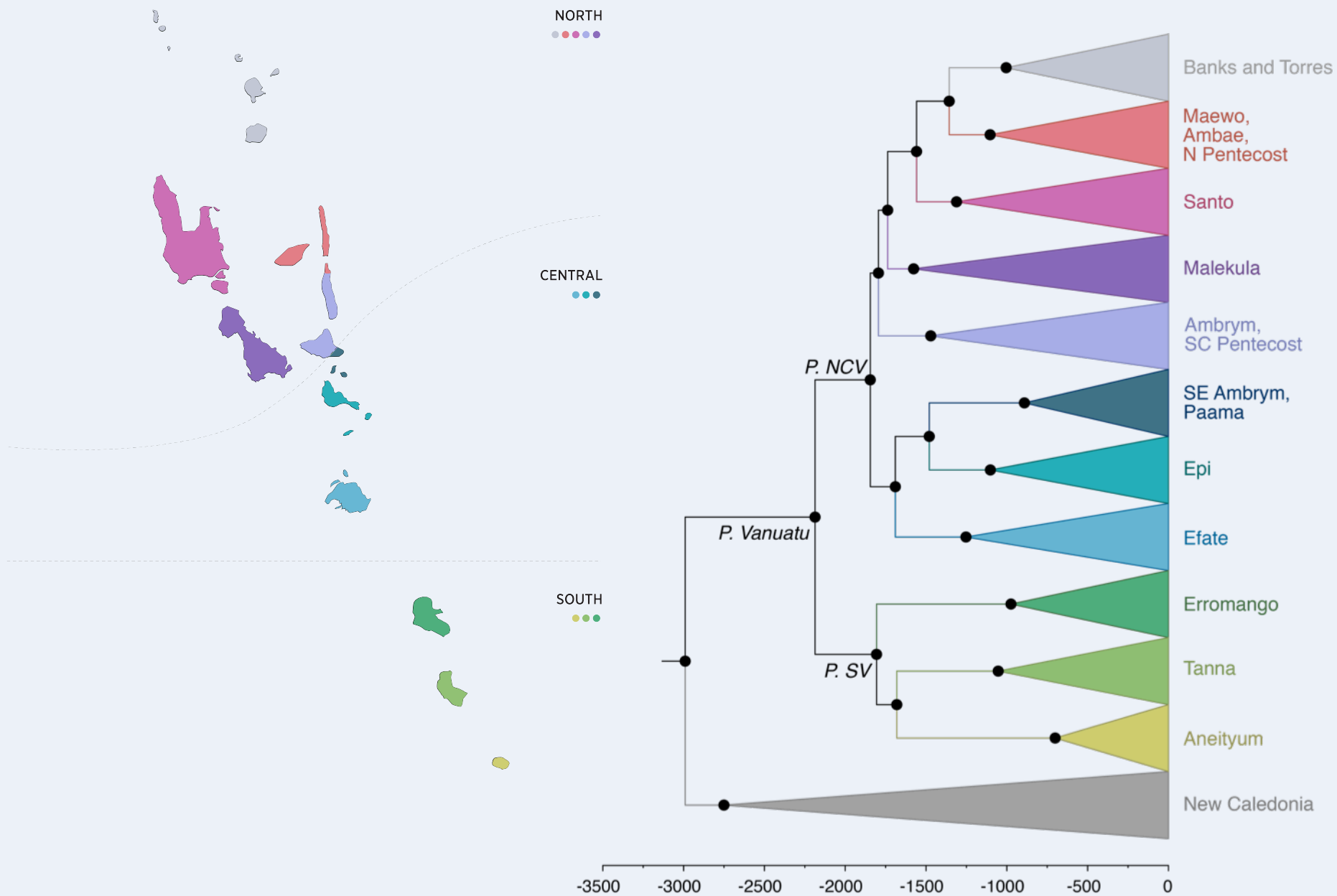


Diversity: Distinct Types

- All Vanuatu languages are members of the Oceanic subgroup
- Most are Southern Oceanic languages, and are further subgrouped into two main groups:
 - North-Central Vanuatu
 - Southern Vanuatu
- Four Polynesian languages are also present in Vanuatu.

Diversity: Distinct Types

- The presence of these Polynesian languages is due to a series of large-scale migrations, around 1000 years ago from the Western area of Polynesia.
- Today there remain four remnants of these migrations, four PN languages spoken in C and S Vanuatu.
- These migrations not only brought in distinctly different kinds of languages, but led to borrowing from PN languages in Southern and Central Vanuatu and the development of a mixed language in Emae.



Diversity: Divergence

- Several aberrant features found in the Oceanic languages of Vanuatu:
 - quinary numeral systems
 - serial verb constructions
 - bilabial trills (1%)
 - labial velar stops (5.7%)
 - velar laterals (0,3%)
 - prenasalised voiceless plosives (3%)
 - linguolabials (0,2%)

Bilabial Trill



[na-^mbu^mbu] 'grass'

Shimelman, Aviva, Paul Heggarty, Giovanni Abete, Laura Wägerle, Darja Dërmaku-Appelganz & Mary Walworth. 2019. Sound Comparisons: Malakula. (Available online at <https://soundcomparisons.com/Vanuatu>, Accessed on 2019-05-14.

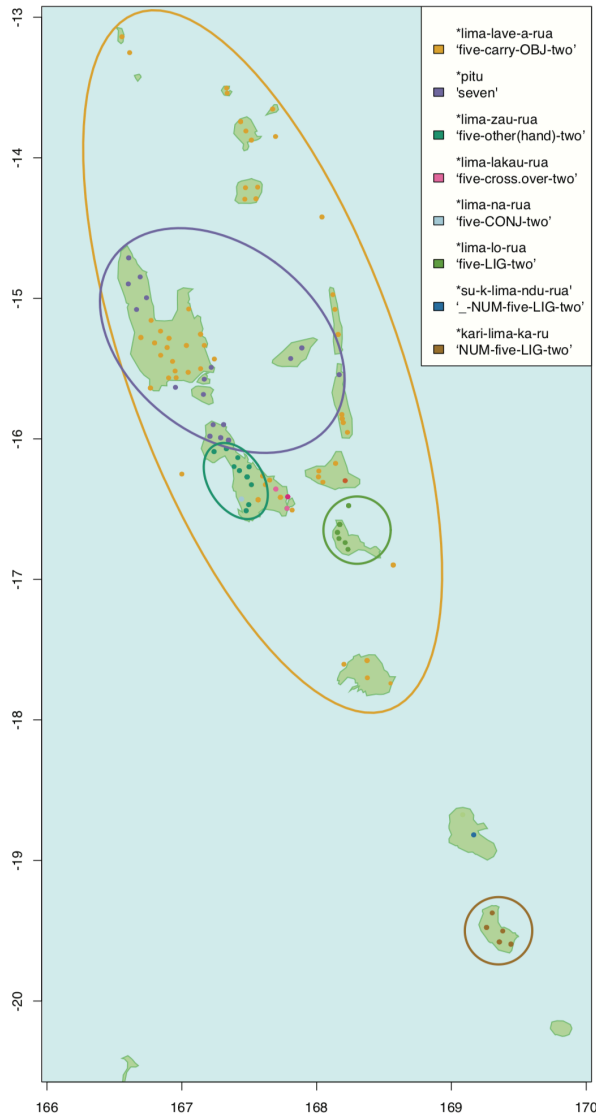
Labial velar stop



[rkp^wa] 'woman'

François, Alexandre. The elves, Dorig corpus. Pangloss Collection, LACITO-CNRS.
http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/pangloss/resource/crdo-WWO_FARFADETS_SOUND&crdo-WWO_FARFADETS. Accessed 2017-05-22

Quinary Numeral Systems



Map of Internal Reconstructions for 'Seven'

Proto Oceanic:

***pitu 'seven'**

Proto Central-East Vanuatu:

***lima-lave-a-rua 'five-carry-OBJ-two'**

Proto West Malekula:

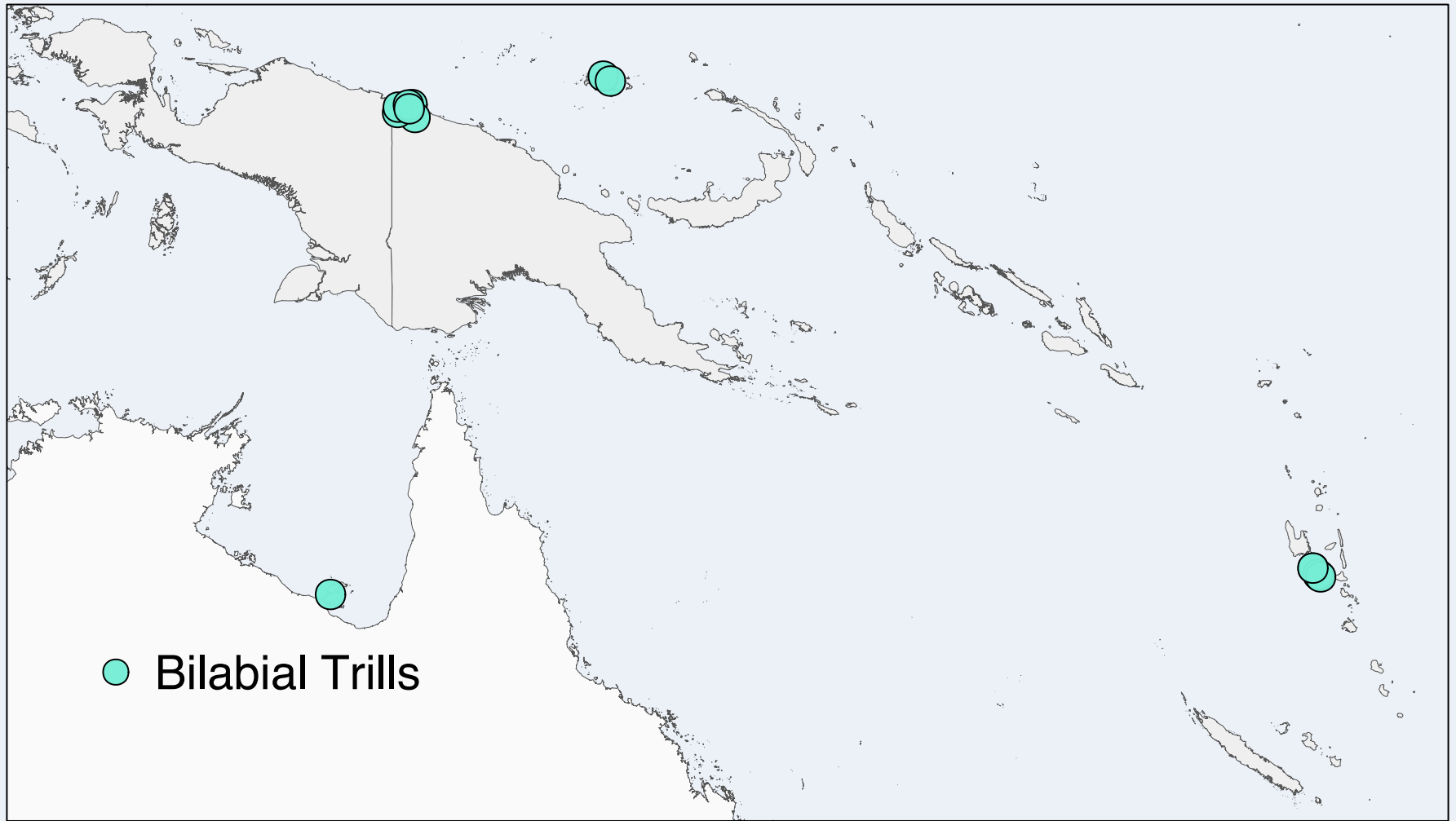
***lima-zau-rua 'five-other(hand)-two'**

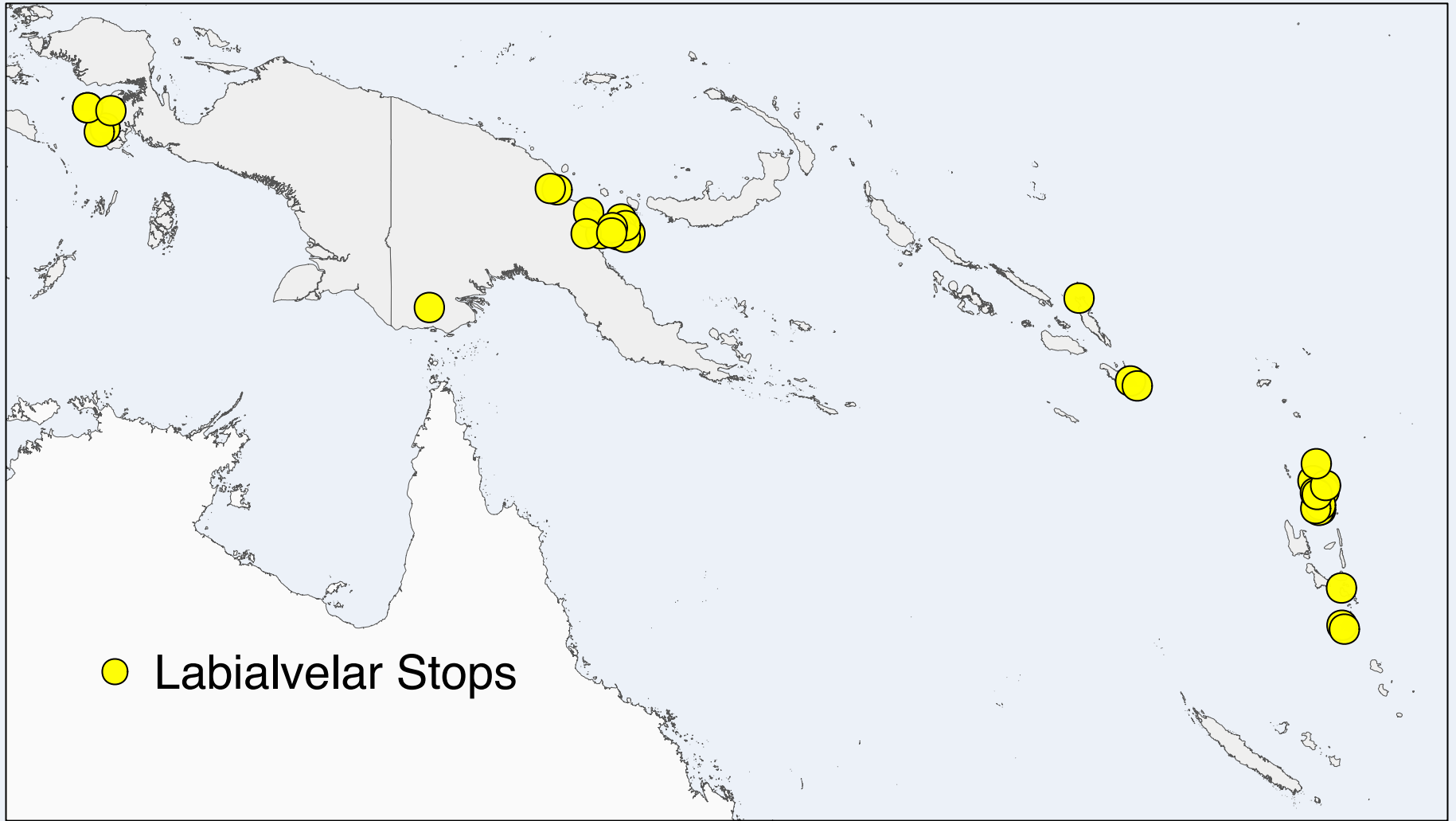
Proto Tanna:

***kari-lima-ka-ru 'NUM-five-LIG-two'**

Diversity: Divergence

- Waves of migration from New Guinea in Vanuatu's early settlement period may be responsible for at least some of Vanuatu's linguistic divergence.
- Many of the unusual features found in the Oceanic languages of Vanuatu can be attributed to Papuan influence (Posth et al 2018).





Diversity: Divergence

- Reconstructions for some of these features to Proto Vanuatu languages signals earlier development in Vanuatu's linguistic history, supporting an early Papuan presence in Vanuatu.
 - Quinary systems: Proto Southern Vanuatu (Lynch 2001)
 - Labial velar stops: Proto North-Central Vanuatu (Clark 2009)
 - *p/c* gap: Proto North-Central Vanuatu (Clark 2009)
 - Bilabial trills: Proto Central-East Malekula

Diversity: Divergence (Internal)

Diversity: Variation

- Hundreds of total language varieties; nearly every village speaking its own variety
- Variation in Vanuatu can be explained in large part by social bias where the “emergence of linguistic diversity is due to the exploitation of language in its emblematic function.” (François 2012:86)

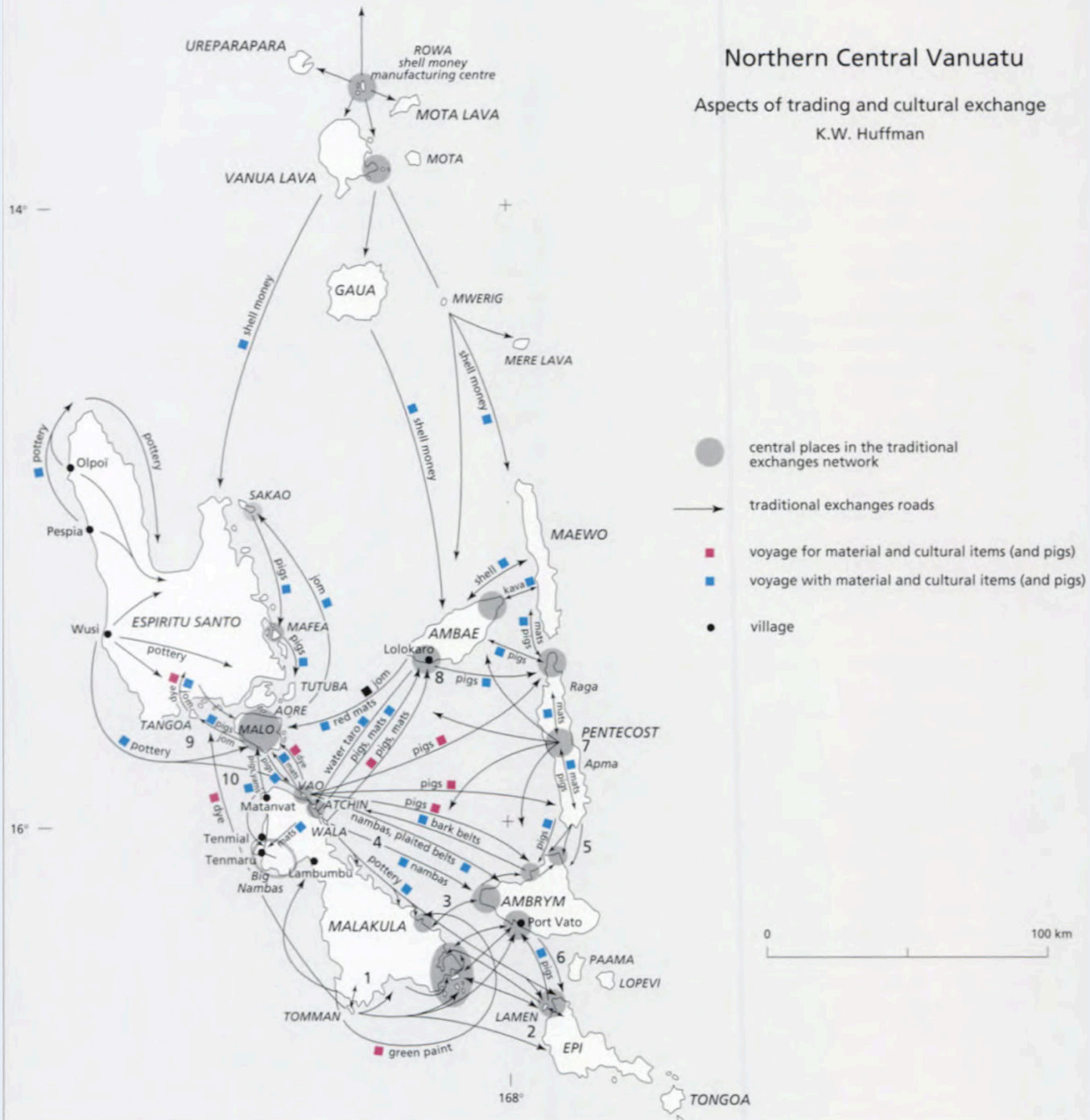
Diversity: Multilingualism

- Multilingualism is the norm throughout Vanuatu.
- Resulting from overlapping networks of exchange and interaction (Bonnemaison 1986, Huffman 1997, Tryon 1998, Bedford & Spriggs 2014)
 - Trading of valued goods: mats, pigs, pottery, shell money, taro
 - Environmental pressures
 - Bride exchange
 - Family alliance
 - Linguistic exogamy

Northern Central Vanuatu

Aspects of trading and cultural exchange

K.W. Huffman



Summary

- Vanuatu's linguistic diversity is not simply concerning number of languages.
- Vanuatu languages are diverse in how they diverge from Proto Oceanic, how they represent identity, and how they are used.
- The reasons for this diversity center around contact and interaction:
 - within Vanuatu through localized networks
 - with non-Austronesian speaking peoples
 - with distantly related Oceanic-speaking peoples



Tankiu tumas!

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