

LANGUAGE DEATH IN INDONESIA: A SOCIOCULTURAL PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The number of languages in Indonesia exceeds 700, but more than 70% of these languages are spoken in eastern Indonesia, where many speakers of heritage languages are shifting their allegiance to local dialects of Malay or to Indonesian. This essay focuses on the languages of Buru and Seram and the nearby islands of Maluku Province. Because parts of this region formed the earliest Dutch colony in Indonesia, historical documentation allows us to explore language use and language vitality since the sixteenth century. The essay is divided into two parts. In Part 1, materials available from the colonial period are examined and summarized. They reveal that as early as the nineteenth century many languages of this region, especially on the island of Ambon, were already extinct because villagers had become monolingual speakers of Ambonese Malay. In Part 2, reports and academic studies written after 1945 are reviewed. In this post-colonial era, language loss has continued, perhaps even accelerated; some socioeconomic factors are suggested. In the conclusion, the profiles of eight of the Maluku languages estimated in 1983 to have fewer than fifty speakers are compared to the most recent reports of language use and language shift. All eight of these languages are now extinct or on the verge of extinction. This essay, sketching language shift and language death, has implications for all the languages of Indonesia. How can local communities working with government officials and linguists act decisively to maintain and revitalize their ancestral languages?

Keywords: language death, language shift, Maluku languages

Abstrak

Ada lebih dari 700 bahasa di Indonesia. Lebih dari 70% di antaranya ada di Indonesia bagian timur; di sana banyak penutur telah beralih menggunakan bahasa Melayu dialek lokal atau bahasa Indonesia. Makalah ini berfokus pada bahasa-bahasa di Pulau Buru dan Seram serta pulau-pulau sekitarnya di Provinsi Maluku. Beberapa bagian daerah ini terbentuk dari kolonialisme Belanda di Indonesia; dan karena itu dokumentasi sejarah dapat menunjukkan penggunaan dan vitalitas bahasa sejak abad ke-16. Tulisan ini terbagi menjadi dua bagian. Pada Bagian 1, materi yang ada pada periode penjajahan diteliti dan dirangkum. Sejak abad ke-19, banyak bahasa di daerah ini, khususnya di Kepulauan Ambon, telah punah karena penduduknya telah menjadi penutur monolingual, yaitu Melayu Ambon. Pada Bagian 2, laporan dan penelitian akademik yang ditulis setelah 1945 direviu. Pada masa pascakolonial, kepunahan bahasa terus berlangsung, bahkan makin meningkat, yang mungkin disebabkan oleh faktor sosial-ekonomi. Pada bagian simpulan, profil dari delapan bahasa di Maluku – yang pada 1983 diperkirakan hanya memiliki kurang dari 50 penutur – dibandingkan dengan laporan terkini mengenai penggunaan bahasa dan pergeseran bahasa. Kedelapan bahasa tersebut sekarang telah punah atau hampir punah. Makalah ini, yang meneropong pergeseran dan kepunahan bahasa, berimplikasi pada semua bahasa yang ada

di Indonesia. Bagaimana komunitas lokal yang bekerja sama dengan pejabat pemerintah dan linguist dapat berperan aktif untuk mempertahankan dan merevitalisasi bahasa-bahasa nenek moyangnya?

Kata kunci: *kepunahan bahasa, pergeseran bahasa, bahasa-bahasa di Maluku*

INTRODUCTIONⁱ

According to *Ethnologue* (2014), seven hundred six languages are spoken in Indonesia, making Indonesia the nation with the second largest number of languages in the world.ⁱⁱ Moreover, the geographic distribution of these hundreds of languages is not even. With few exceptions, the further east one travels the more languages are spoken. Indeed, 498 of those 706 languages are spoken in just three regions of Indonesia. See Table 1.

Region	Number of languages
Sumatra	49
Java	17
Kalimantan	74
Nusa Tenggara	73
Sulawesi	114
Maluku	128
Papua	256

Table 1. The geographic distribution of heritage languages in the regions of Indonesia (*Ethnologue*, 2014)

However, these 498 languages, that is 70.5% of all of Indonesia's languages, are spoken in some of the regions with the sparsest populations. This already suggests a disproportionate relationship between the number of languages and the number of speakers (Collins, 2018b, 2019a). With few exceptions, the number of speakers of each of those 498 languages is quite small. Moreover, despite steady nationwide population growth, the number of speakers of many of these heritage languages is declining because, in many cases, speakers are shifting their allegiance from their heritage languages to other languages and dialects.

In this brief essay, the heritage languages of the islands of Seram and Buru as well their adjacent islands will be the focus of our purview. This area, named here as Central Malukuⁱⁱⁱ, forms the northern part of the Province of Maluku. See Map 1.



Map 1. Buru, Seram and the adjacent islands, Central Maluku

(Adapted from Atlas Maluku, available at Landelijk Steunpunt Educatie Molukkers Utrecht, 1998)

Central Maluku was chosen for this essay on language death in Indonesia because of the high level of diversity as well as the time-depth of records of observations about this diversity. By examining the trajectory of language endangerment and language loss in a region with perhaps the longest span of language documentation in Indonesia, and by focusing on the social context of the language ecology of these islands of Central Maluku, the intention is to encourage the development of strategies aimed at impeding language shift and perhaps reversing it. Beyond the shores and mountains of Maluku because language shift is occurring throughout Indonesia.

The first section of this essay provides some of the information about Central Maluku's heritage languages gleaned from sources published during the colonial era. Then, in the second section, we will review materials after 1945, focusing on the vitality status of some of the 50 Austronesian languages named in *Ethnologue* (2021) that are or were spoken by communities in just this one area of eastern Indonesia, Central Maluku. Linguistic data and demographic estimates of the population of these language communities are based on a two-year language survey conducted largely in 1977-1979 (see Collins, 1983a, 2018a). In the conclusion, some more recent observations and reports will be taken into account as well.

THE LANGUAGES OF CENTRAL MALUKU: COLONIAL SOURCES

In 1512, westerners, the Portuguese, arrived in Central Maluku, first in the Banda islands and then in Asilulu and Hitu on Ambon Island (Fraassen, 1983). Through this initial Portuguese presence, the language diversity of the region was first noted in the sixteenth century, albeit rarely. In a letter, dated 10 May 1546 and written on Ambon Island by a Catholic priest, Francis Xavier (Sá 1954:499), we read:

Cada isla destas tiene lengua por sí y ay isla que quasi cada lugar della tiene habla diferente.

“Every island has a language of its own; there is even an island where almost every place has a different parlance.”

Francis Xavier, a graduate of the university in Paris, was himself a polyglot, speaking his heritage language, Basque, as well as Spanish, Italian, French and Latin. Nonetheless, because his task was to explain Christian doctrine, he chose to learn Malay and use it as the language of proselytization; indeed, he wrote little more about the indigenous languages of the region.

The Portuguese retained control of Central Maluku almost one-hundred years. But in 1605, they surrendered the fort in Ambon and their territories in the region to the Dutch trading corporation, the VOC.^{iv} The Catholic priests were ordered to leave Central Maluku and their Catholic converts became Protestants. One of the VOC employees who came to serve the Christian congregations of Central Maluku was the French-Japanese Protestant minister, Franchois Caron, who, in his book of sermons (1693), discussed the tasks of a minister and the languages of the ministry in Central Maluku, as follows:

Cardjahan deri pandita pandita, jang jaddi ancat deri pada Tsaurat Igresia, acan menoungou pada orang Nassarani, seperti Combala pada domba domba. Patut djanja adjar bahasa Malejo, daan djica dapat, bahasa Ambon...

The task of the ministers, appointed by the Church Synod, is to look after the the Christians, just as a shepherd does his sheep. He should learn Malay, and, if feasible, the language of Ambon.

In the seventeenth century, the indigenous languages of Ambon were referred to as the Ambonese language (*bahasa Ambon*).^v Indeed, in that century, the local languages were still spoken in all the Christian and Muslim villages of the island.

Caron's contemporary resident of Ambon was the pioneer seventeenth century scholar of life sciences, Georg Rumphius. This German employee of the VOC "recorded the local names of the plants and animals in two or three heritage languages of Ambon and the adjacent islands side by side with the scientific Latin nomenclature he was inventing" (Collins, 2018b), for example, in both *Het Amboinsch Kruid-boek* (1690, 1701) and *D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer* (1698, 1999). Indeed, as late as 1678 Rumphius (1983/1678:7) wrote specifically about the indigenous languages of Ambon Island, asserting that the language variants (*dialectos*) of Hatiwe and Hitu were the most elegant (*'cirelijkste'*); see Collins (2012b). Today Hatiwe and all the indigenous languages on the shores and hills of Ambon Bay^{vi} have long been extinct; but Rumphius (1698, 1999) recorded a number of lexical items scattered in that text in a variant he called "*Leijtimor*"—probably the only existing record of Hatiwe or the other languages once spoken in those villages of Ambon Bay.

Another Protestant missionary, François Valentyn, served the congregations of Central Maluku from 1686-1694, when he met Rumphius, and again in 1707-1713. In his massive work, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, apparently following Rumphius's notion of one Ambonese language with numerous variants, Valentyn (1724:243) asserted that, although Malay was widely spoken, the heritage language of Ambon functioned as the first language ("*moeder-Taal*") among the indigenous peoples of Central Maluku. Although he discussed the Ambonese language (*Amboineesche Taal*) as if it were a unitary language, he noted that speakers in the west of Ambon Island spoke a completely different "dialect" (*een geheel verschillend Dialect, en tong-val*) from that in the east of the island and often resorted to using Malay to understand each other. He considered the language of Hoamoal (present-day Luhu) to be the best Ambonese language.

With the exception of those words scattered in Rumphius's books (as mentioned above), there are very few examples of indigenous Central Maluku vocabulary in seventeenth-century publications and even fewer mentions of local languages in Dutch sources of the following century. The end of the VOC in 1799 marked a renewed and more academic interest in the heritage languages of Central Maluku. Sadly, many of the local languages of Ambon, the *moeder-taal* Valentyn wrote about, did not survive into the nineteenth century. "Ludeking (1868:192) wrote that the indigenous languages had completely died out in the city of Ambon (except among Muslims). Moreover, language loss was not simply an urban phenomenon; rather, it was far more widespread. At about the same time as Ludeking's observation, van Hoëvell (1876:4-5)^{vii} reported that in Christian villages on Ambon Island (except the three villages of Allang, Hatu and Liliboi on Ambon's western tip), the local languages had completely died out; all had been replaced by Ambonese Malay" (Collins, 2018b).

Documented language loss in the nineteenth century, especially in Christian villages, was even more widespread. As noted in Collins (2003):

Even on Saparua island [to the east of Ambon], van Ekris (1864-1865:65) reported that the use of the indigenous language was the rule among Muslims, but the exception among Christians.^{viii} ... Certainly by the end of the nineteenth century, only two languages were still spoken in Ambon's Christian villages. In Allang (and, according to van Hoëvell [see above] at that time still in Hatu and Liliboi too) a dialect closely related to the language of Wakasihu (Collins, 1983[a]) was spoken; see Ludeking (1868). In Waai, a variant similar to the language now used in Tulehu and Liang, was still spoken, or at least remembered, as demonstrated by the wordlist included in Ludeking (1868).

So, as early as one hundred fifty years ago, many languages in Central Maluku, especially in Christian villages on Ambon and the Uliasse islands, like Saparua, were already extinct.^{ix}

Although in the nineteenth century, many heritage languages were extinct, especially in Christian villages of Ambon and Saparua, in that same century scholars, ministers and colonial officials collected and published language data collected in numerous villages in Central Maluku, including some on Buru and Seram. As early as 1821, C.G.C. Reinwardt (1858:460), founder of the Bogor Botanical Garden in Java, collected plant specimens in Central Maluku and, during that trip, visited Hitu on the north coast of Ambon Island, where he collected a small vocabulary of Hitu, published in 1858. Van Schmid (1843), assistant resident of Saparua (Lalala 2018), described the customs and beliefs of Saparua, Haruku and Nusa Laut with many terms in Ambonese Malay and sometimes the local languages. These brief glimpses of heritage languages still in use in the early 18th century were superseded by the materials produced after 1860.

A Dutch minister with the *Nederlandsch Zendelinggenootschap* (NZG), A. van Ekris (1864-1865), published a 70-page comparative vocabulary of eleven Central Maluku languages. The entries are arranged alphabetically based on the form of the lexeme in the language of Kamarian (the village where van Ekris was posted), followed by brief Dutch glosses, sometimes Ambonese Malay glosses and then lexical examples drawn from the ten other languages of his study: Hatusua, Waisamu, Kaibobo, Piru (all along the east coast of Piru Bay, Seram), Karu (Haruku), Tihulale, Rumakai on the south coast of Seram), Hatawano (Saparua), Nalahia (Nusaluat) and Alune spoken in several villages in the interior of western Seram.

E.W.A. Ludeking, a health officer in the colonial army stationed at the military hospital in Ambon (1861-1863), wrote a book about the *Residentie Amboina*. In that book, Ludeking (1868:197-274), appended a 77-page list of medical terms, foods, flora and fauna with Dutch or scientific Latin names as the head words with the corresponding lexemes in Ambonese Malay and twenty indigenous languages of Ambon, Uliase, Buru and Seram.^x These data must be used with caution because they are not reliable. Ludeking (1868:194-195) also included a two-page summary of the villages on the northeast coast of Seram (*afdeeling Wahaay*) where fifteen languages were spoken; occasionally he noted the vitality status of these languages.^{xi}

In the mid-nineteenth century as well, the renowned naturalist and pioneer of the theory of evolution, Alfred Russell Wallace, conducted extensive research and data collection in Central Maluku (1857-1861). Although his field of research was life sciences, like others of that era, Wallace (1869) appended several wordlists to his book meant for the general public. Most of these wordlists he himself collected including seven languages of Seram, four that were still in use on Ambon Island at that time, namely Liang, Morela, Batu Merah dan Larike,^{xii} three variants spoken on Buru as well as wordlists from Ambelau, Saparua, Goram and Watubela.

In 1877 a Dutch bureaucrat posted to Ambon, G.W.W.C. van Hoëvell, produced a comparative grammar and dictionary of five languages of Ambon and Uliase, namely Asilulu, Hitu, Haruku, Saparua dan Nusa Laut.^{xiii} This historic vocabulary of these five languages contains approximately one thousand entries organized alphabetically according to the Dutch headword. Although there are some printing errors and some of the data needs checking, this work is a significant contribution. Below (Illustration 1) is a sample page (highlighting sago terminology) from *De woordenschat de Ambonsche landtaal* (van Hoëvell 1877:38-126). As noted in Collins (1983a:3):

Not only does he provide the first attempt to subgroup these languages and several other languages of Seram, he also specifically notes ‘the relationship between the Ambonese indigenous languages and some of the idioms of the South-Sea islanders ..., (and) the language of the Aru people’. His proposed classification of the languages of Seram and Uliase is quite comprehensive, though he failed to work out a detailed justification for these groups.

S.	
sabel	<i>pedang</i> (Sap: N: Har: Hil: Asil:).
sagæ	<i>lepial</i> (Sap:) <i>ripial</i> (N:) <i>lapia</i> (Har:) <i>lepia</i> (Asil: Hil:).
sagæ-tæman	<i>lepial aanatol</i> (Sap:) <i>ripial anaatol</i> (N:) <i>lapia of lepia tæmane</i> (Har: Hil: Asil:).
sagæbrood (sagæ-lem- pen)	<i>paül</i> (Sap: N:) <i>pæ-hæwa</i> (Har:) <i>pæ-</i> <i>pæti</i> (Hil:) <i>papæ</i> (Asil:).
sagæ-tætpola	<i>pæ-ætpola</i> (Sap:) <i>pæ tætpola</i> (N: Har:) <i>pæpæti-tætpola</i> (Hil:) <i>papæ tætpola</i> (Asil:).
sagæ-papeda	<i>pello</i> (Sap:) <i>peljo</i> (N:) <i>lapia</i> (Har:) <i>lepia</i> (Asil: Hil:).
sagæweer, sageræ	<i>tæwao, tæwaol</i> (Sap: N:) <i>tæwao</i> (Har:) <i>mælië</i> (Asil: Hil:)
sagæweerboom	<i>nawal</i> (Sap: N:) <i>nawa</i> (Har: Hil:) <i>maka</i> (Asil:).

Illustration 1. The first entries beginning with S in the vocabulary of van Hoëvell (1877:101)

As a concrete result of his fieldwork in Seram (1910-1912), the German ornithologist, Erwin Stresemann wrote a grammar of Paulohi, a language spoken on the west shore of Elpaputi Bay, Seram. *Die Paulohisprache* (Stresemann 1918), written in close cooperation with a speaker of Paulohi, Markus Mailopu, was completed in Dresden (Germany) in 1914 and published (in German) in Den Haag (Netherlands). See Illustration 2. This 243-page book about the Paulohi language^{xiv} was organized systematically in a pattern that followed the hierarchy of twentieth century grammars (2003): first grammar, then a lexicon and a few pages of narration, including one by Mailopu himself. The structure of the Paulohi grammar itself closely follows traditional Latin grammars.^{xv}

In the Paulohi grammar of 1918, Stresemann also included considerable speculation about language classification in this early book. However, as noted in Collins (1983a:4), this was superseded by a more comprehensive overview of Central Maluku languages:

After he had consulted and worked with Jonker and Dempwolff in Europe, in 1927 Stresemann attempted a classification by subgrouping all the languages of Central Maluku, which he numbered at about fifty. This work, *Die Lauterscheinungen in den Ambonischen Sprachen*, is a bold pioneering attempt to subgroup an entire branch of the Austronesian family; in fact, it is one of the earliest systematic attempts at subgrouping in the family. ...It remains the chief source of information about these languages and their relationships to each other.

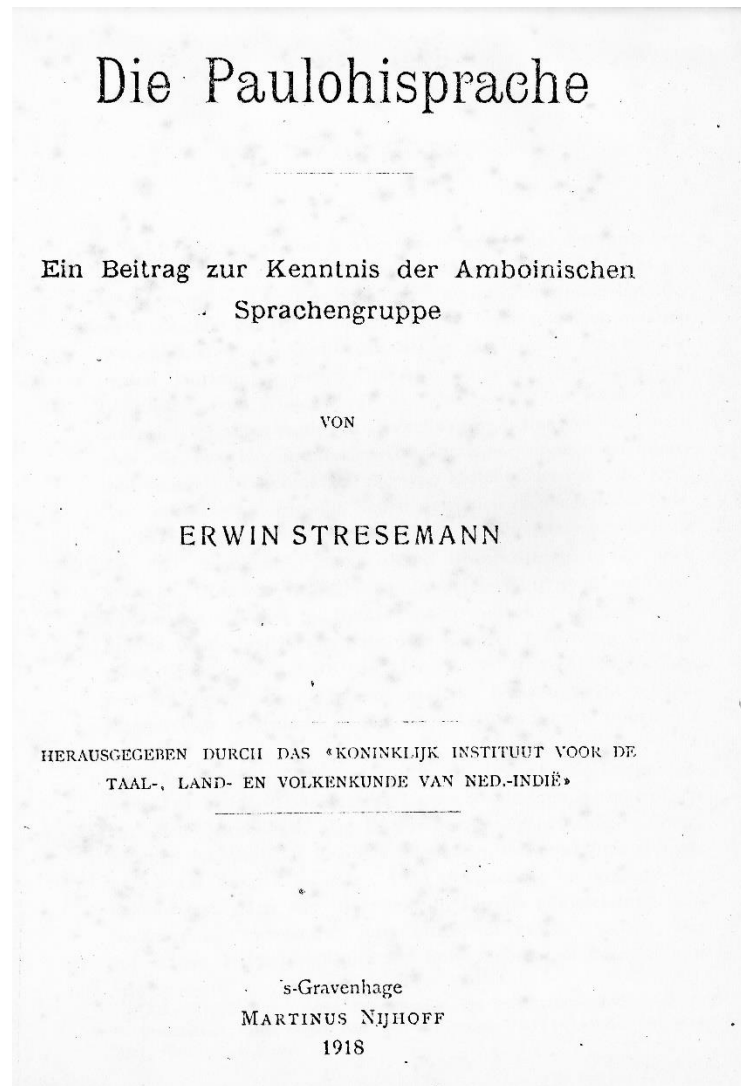


Illustration 2 Title page of Stresemann's (1918) *Die Paulohisprache*

In contrast to Stresemann's 1918 in-depth study of Paulohi, very little was written about the language of Buru, with a much larger community of speakers. However, Hendriks (1897), a Protestant missionary of the *Utrechtsche Zendeling-Vereeniging* who spent ten years working in Masarete (southwestern Buru), published a grammar and vocabulary that was widely used by scholars of Austronesian comparative linguistics; see Collins (2018a) for information about a few other sources for the Buru language.

For languages of Seram, a few more wordlists and studies were published in the late colonial era. For example, Sierevelt (1920), who wrote about the Alune language including some dialogues and Tauern (1928-31), who discussed the relationship of Alune and Wemale as well as other west Seram languages including Lisabata, Loun and Eti. Cocq D'Armandville's (1901) study of Bonfia in the setting of other languages in eastern Seram was a pioneering contribution. However, in fact, during the colonial era (1894-1939), a great deal of language data was collected through the Holle wordlist project, supported by the *Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* with the approval of the Dutch government (Stokhof 1980:1-2). Perhaps as many as 36 wordlists of languages in Central Maluku were collected throughout these islands as part of

this archipelagic project. However, none of the Central Maluku materials were published until 1981-1982 (see Stokhof 1981a, 1981b, 1982a, 1982b). These materials constitute an invaluable resource for the study of the diverse languages of Central Maluku, especially those languages that are no longer spoken or “remembered”.

THE LANGUAGES OF CENTRAL MALUKU: POST-COLONIAL SOURCES

The work of H. Niggemeyer (1951-1952) forms a bridge between the colonial and post-colonial eras. The data that form the basis of his study were collected in the 1930's, but these data and his scholarly analyses were only published after 1950. These data include narrative texts and wordlists of the Alune language (western Seram) as well as a grammar. Soon after the publication of Niggemeyer's essay, the study of languages shifted away from texts to a new, supposedly more “scientific” approach: Lexicostatistics.

In 1965, Dyen published his ground-breaking lexicostatistical classification of Austronesian languages. Although he had conducted no data collection in Central Maluku, he had perused *De woordenschat de Ambonsche landtaal* (van Hoëvell 1877:38-126), discussed above, and included Asilulu, Hitu, Haruku, Saparua and Nusa Laut in his classification.^{xvi} Similarly, Dyen (1978b) relied on another nineteenth century source to theorize about languages on Seram. “[H]e analysed those languages which van Ekris described (1864-5). He provides a new classification of them and points out important phenomena in the Proto-Central Maluku sound inventory which have implications for the highest levels of Proto-Austronesian sub-branching” (Collins, 1983a:4).

The Russian anthropologist, M. Chlenov, collected language data when he was part of a Soviet-era infrastructure project in Ambon. Only a few years after the appearance of Dyen's book (1965) on Austronesian lexicostatistics, Chlenov (1969) completed his dissertation. “[B]ased on Chlenov's lexicostatistical calculations..., a preliminary reassessment of Stresemann's subgrouping was included [in Chlenov (1969)]. In a still more recent book (1976), Chlenov has provided a whole new classification of languages in Central and Southwest Maluku” (Collins, 1983a:4). Working with an Estonian linguist, Y. Sirk, Chlenov's data was analyzed to provide a new perspective on the merger of Proto-Austronesian *b and *p in “Ambonese” languages (Chlenov and Sirk, 1973). Another study, perhaps influenced by lexicostatistic methods (Collins, 1983b), focused on cultural vocabulary in Central Maluku languages (Chlenov, 1980).

Sadly, the dubious results of 1960's lexicostatistical methodology still plague the study of Central Maluku's languages. This quick and easy approach has yielded publications riddled with errors. For example, according to Travis (1986), based on a few days of training and a mere 210-item questionnaire, six foreign trainees visited eight villages on Ambon; lexical similarities among the materials collected were ascertained by computer programs. If any of these results differed from earlier classifications (Collins, 1983a), this was because Collins “*hanya meninjau bahasa-bahasa Ambon dari segi sejarah bahasa saja*”, and was not focused on communication issues; see Collins (2016). Collins (2019b) criticized the incorrect results of another approach to language classification involving short questionnaires and dubious statistical analysis. In Mahsun (2008), several languages spoken near Taniwel on the north coast of Seram were considered dialects of Yamdena, a language spoken in southern Tanimbar. The point-to-point distance between Taniwel and Yamdena speakers is 643 kilometres! Inadequate training in fieldwork procedures and the use of statistical methods as well as a shocking failure to listen to the

indigenous language resource persons (Mukhamdanah, 2015) yielded a completely mistaken, indeed unethical, classification of at least five distinct languages of Central Maluku.^{xvii} Nonetheless, despite the inadequacies of lexicostatistics, some scholars who have dabbled in lexicostatistics have made significant contributions to the study of Central Maluku languages because they became participant-observers who collected large quantities of data; for example, W.D. Laidig (Laidig and Laidig (1991); Laidig (1993)) focused on the language of Larike (western shore of Ambon island) and R. Bolton (1990, 1999; Florey and Bolton, 1997; Bolton et al., 2004; Bolton and Matoke, 2005) writing about the Nuaulu language (southern Seram).

Another scholar focusing on the Nuaulu community is the British anthropologist, R. Ellen, who began studying the Nuaulu in 1969. He has steadily produced scholarly essays and books with accounts of traditional agriculture, sorcery, rituals, foods and ethnobiology in the context of the Nuaulu ethnic group. In one of his earliest published essays (Ellen, 1972) about the marsupial in Nuaulu rituals, his attention to indigenous vocabulary in semantic and cultural detail is remarkable. In addition to a wealth of lexical information related to animals, Ellen (1993:209 and elsewhere) specifically discussed multilingualism among the Nuaulu.^{xviii} See Illustration 3.

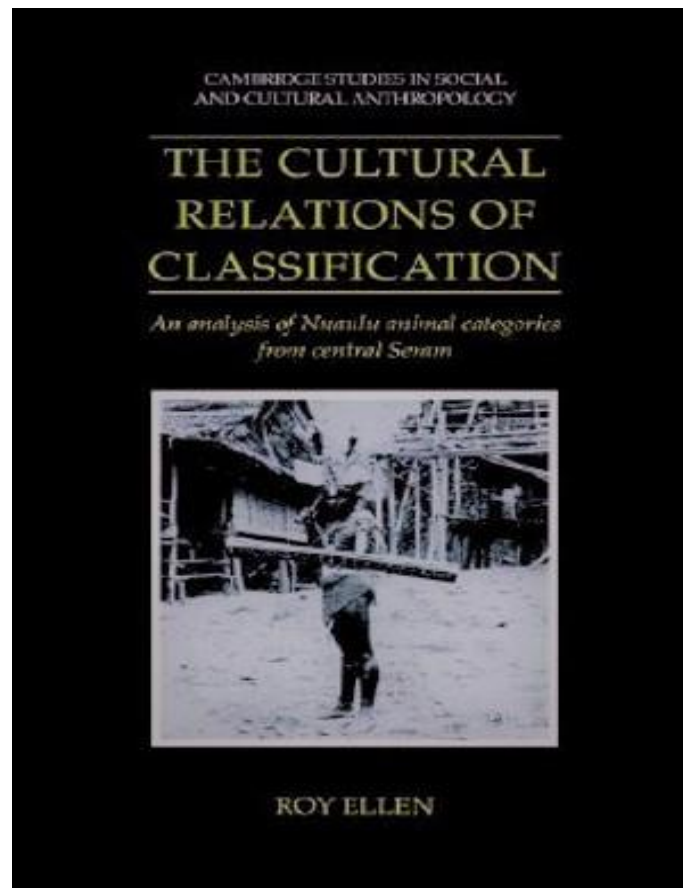


Illustration 3. The cover of Ellen's (1993) book detailing the Nuaulu classifications of animal knowledge

Another anthropologist, the Italian Valerio Valeri, began his research about the Huaulu group in 1971. The Huaulu community, whose language is a variant of the Manusela language, live in the mountainous interior on the north coast of Seram. In addition to including many Huaulu

lexical items in all of his work, for example his analysis of the naming of marsupials (Valeri, 2000:264-266), Valeri (2000:17-20) explained the linguistic grouping in Central Seram; he treated Huaulu polyglossia in greater detail in Valeri (2001). An American anthropologist, Hagen (2006), studied another Manusela-speaking group further east in Seram, the Maneo community. The use of Ambonese Malay was more widespread than Valeri (2001:357) observed among the Huaulu. As Hagen (2006:xv) wrote:

Initially, interviews and conversations were conducted in Ambonese-Malay, a regional variant of Indonesian, as opposed to the local language; nearly everyone is bilingual. In fact, many of the young people were more proficient speaking Ambonese-Malay than Upa'a (the local language) ... Church services and school ... were both conducted in more formal Indonesian, and students could be punished for speaking the local language. In addition, many parents spoke only Ambonese-Malay to their children.

In contrast to scholarly attention to Seram, after Hendriks pioneering work in 1897, very little has been written about the language of Buru (Illustration 4). Almost 100 years later, an American missionary, C. Devin, made available a dictionary of the language (1978a) and a tentative grammar (1978b). Perhaps, the 1978 manuscripts formed the basis of Devin's (1984) dictionary. Another American, C.E. Grimes, produced several studies of the Buru language, some of which are available at <http://www.language-archives.org/language/mhs>. Wolff (2018) relied on Grimes (1991) for his chapter on Buru.

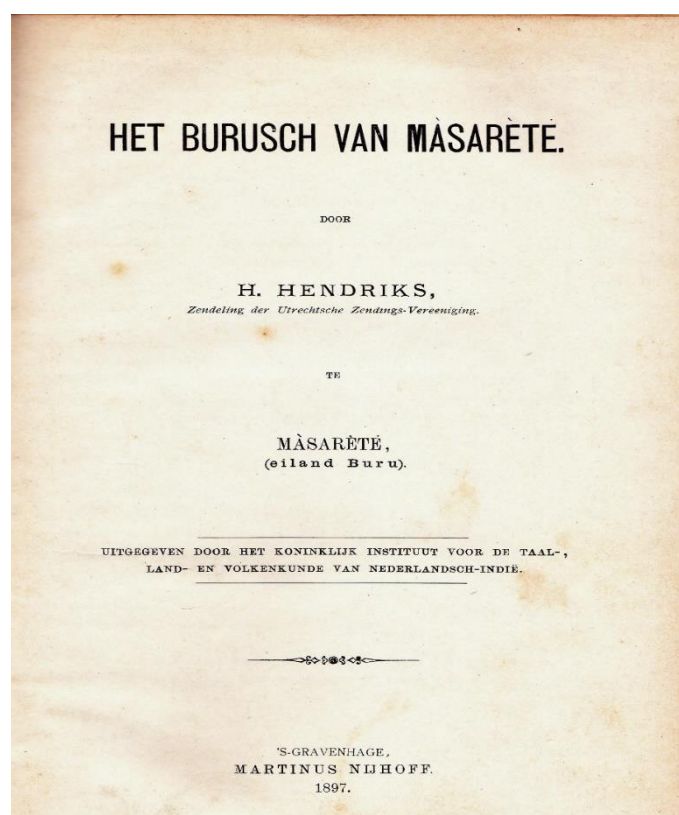


Illustration 4. The title page of Hendriks's comprehensive study of the language of Buru as spoken around Masarete

The year 1980, marks a turning point in the study of the languages of Central Maluku. **Linguists**, not ornithologists, health officials, missionaries, *controlleurs*, anthropologists, but ordinary linguists, began to publish the results of their empirical research about the indigenous languages of the region. With the support of the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture as well as the Indonesian Linguistics Development Program managed by Leiden University in the Netherlands, Abdullah Payapo, a faculty member at IKIP Surabaya (now Universitas Negeri Surabaya) who had completed the 1979 *Penataran Morfologi-Sintaksis I* program in Bogor, undertook fieldwork in Luhu, western Seram. The 86-page report, *Morfologi bahasa Luhu* (Payapo, 1980), constitutes the first study published by a linguist, moreover an **Indonesian** linguist, about his fieldwork and analysis regarding a language of Central Maluku.^{xix} In the same year, Collins (1980) published an essay about the Laha language, the only indigenous language still spoken on the shores of Ambon Bay and adjacent to Ambon's airport. Aspects of Laha grammar and phonology indicate that Laha is indeed a separate Central Maluku language related to the languages of Seit and Hitu.^{xx} "Laha has maintained its indigenous language in the face of increasing pressure from Ambonese Malay but only at the expense of drastic revision of its grammar" (Collins, 1980:14). Some of Collins's other publications about Central Maluku languages can be found in the References below. Perhaps the most frequently cited (and disputed) are Collins (1982 and 1983a).

Payapo wrote his study of the Luhu language from the perspective of descriptive linguistics; Collins focused on languages based on his training in historical comparative linguistics. So, 1990 marks another milestone in the study of Central Maluku languages. M. Florey, an Australian linguist completed her dissertation about language loyalty in Lohiatata, an Alune village: **Language shift: Changing patterns of language allegiance in western Seram.**

"Florey found that '... younger fluent speakers of Alune (aged 35-45 years) have initiated 'a change in the role of Alune from a language used in all domains of daily life to a secret language...' These speakers are 'unintentionally' accelerating language shift in Lohiatata.

Florey's research is exemplary because of the insights she obtained as a participant-observer resident [of the village she studied]; she was able to see beyond overt patterns of language usage to explore language allegiance and the local epistemology of knowledge. In so doing she surpassed earlier, superficial treatments of language change in other parts of Maluku" (Collins, 2008:164).

Single-handedly, Florey (1990) introduced the study of language obsolescence and changing language allegiance as a sociolinguistic phenomenon of critical importance in Central Maluku and all of island Southeast Asia. In the past three decades she has succeeded in collaborating with other scholars in diverse academic fields in studying and writing about Alune and other languages in Central Maluku. A partial list of her publications includes a wide range of topics including Alune ethnozoology (Florey, 2001), incantations and Alune ethnomedical knowledge (Florey and Wolff, 1998), naming taboos among in-laws in Alune and Nualulu (Florey and Bolton, 1997) and language survival among the Maluku diaspora in the Netherlands (Florey and van Engelenhoven, 2000)—all in the context of language shift and language maintenance.

CONCLUSION

In Map 2 the dark grey areas indicate those regions where even in 1980 the heritage languages had already been replaced by Ambonese Malay, based on colonial reports, including van Ekris (1864-1865:65), Ludeking (1868) and van Hoëvell (1876:4-5) as well as the observations made by Collins (1977-1979). But this map does not indicate or measure the true extent of language loss in the late 1970's. In 1992, Professor Joseph E. Grimes proposed a predictive guideline of language loss and retention based on the total number of speakers. "He estimated that few languages with fifty or fewer speakers would survive another generation; moreover, in that same time frame of 25-30 years, only fifty percent of languages with 600 or fewer speakers would survive" (Collins, 2018b). More than forty years have passed since the data of 1977-1978 were collected. What do we know about the status of the Central Maluku languages today?



Map 2. Languages of Seram and the adjacent islands: A selected portion of Sheet 45 (Collins and Voorhoeve 1983)

In Collins and Voorhoeve (1983), eight languages were estimated to have fewer than fifty speakers. See Table 2.

Allang	10
Kamarian	20
S. Haruku	10
Nusalaut	10
Paulohi	50
Naka'ela	3
Hulung	3
Loun	3

Table 2. The estimated number of speakers of eight Central Maluku languages (Collins and Voorhoeve, 1983)^{xxi}

Using Professor Grime's algorithm, probably none of these languages in Table 2 has survived. Below, we can review what has been reported in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries about the viability of these eight languages of Central Maluku.

Allang. In 1976 and 1977 I collected language data in Allang. Two of my chief language resource persons were women aged 70 and 72 at that time; another resource person was a man aged 47. The elderly women seldom used their ancestral language but were excellent speakers who could supply answers to all lexical questions as well as provide verbal and genitive paradigms. Moreover, they volunteered sentences, phrases and many additional lexical items; a total of approximately 900 words were collected. At the time, the village had an estimated population of 4500; perhaps there were 100 persons who could recall the language, almost all of them were over 50 years old. But there was a gap in language competence. Those in their 50's had limited vocabularies and had reinterpreted the verbal inflectional systems.^{xxii} Ewing (2010:120), who conducted fieldwork in Allang described the situation in the early 21st century as follows:

The only remaining fluent speakers of Allang, out of a village population of over 4,000 people, are all over 60 years of age, and among those in this age category only about half (around **60 people**) have good comprehension and production skills.

As Ewing (2010:120) noted, the "local language...is now moribund in Allang."

Kamarian. In late 1978 I visited Kamarian and Rumakai, two of the three villages where the Kamarian language was spoken. At that time the total population in Kamarian was estimated at 3,400, but fewer than 100 seemed to be able to remember the language and they were all over 60 years old. In Rumakai, 20 km. to the east, the population was probably 1,450 and those over 50 years of age were excellent resource persons. In neither village did the speakers know of "the inflectional system of agentive sentences" (Collins, 2021:164) but the loss of these paradigms is not uncommon in East Piru Bay languages of Seram. However, in both villages, the "inflectional system for non-volitional sentences" (Collins, 2021:170)^{xxiii} was still in use (or remembered) for some verbs. In Florey and van Engelenhoven (2000:2), the Kamarian language was considered "moribund in Maluku (< 50 speakers)". In Rumakai, in 1978, the resource persons were younger and more spontaneous; even so, Latupeirissa (2013:235, 76) reported that, now in Rumakai, Ambonese Malay is used by "*seluruh masyarakat... sebagai bahasa ibu*"; only in adat rituals can certain persons use the Rumakai language in some parts of the ritual. Indeed, the Kamarian language in both village is on the threshold of extinction.

S. Haruku. In the 1970's, I conducted no fieldwork in the southern part of Haruku because it was well-known that the local language, said to differ from the language of North Haruku, was extinct. My data collection was limited to the village of Kailolo on the northwest coast of Haruku, where the language was used by all generations, even among the Kailolo "diaspora" in Kairatu and Paulohi (Kennedy, 1955), both locations in Seram. See Collins (2018a:51-52).

Nusalaut. Although I travelled to Nusalaut many times, I collected no data there because in the late 1970's the only people that were rumored to speak the Nusalaut language were a few elderly rememberers in Titawae. The language was discussed in Collins (1983:114-120) and Collins (2018a:52-53).

Paulohi. As noted above, Stresemann was able to work with some of the few survivors of the 1899 tidal wave. Fifty years later, the American anthropologist, R. Kennedy, arrived in Paulohi (November 1949) to collect data for his larger project. Kennedy (1955:121, 157) visited the primary school of the village and wrote:

I asked if the children spoke the bahasa tanah [indigeneous language]. The teacher said that most of them gave it up for Malay. ... In Paulohi and Samasuru^{xxiv} one hundred percent of the population have had schooling and speak Malay...The people in Paulohi and Samasuru are one hundred percent literate.

Kennedy collected about 20 Paulohi words scattered in the text, mostly related to traditional roles in village organization. Then, 30 years later, I arrived in Paulohi (November 1978). I was repeatedly told there were no speakers of Paulohi^{xxv} but eventually I was introduced to an 84-year-old man, a member of the Wemale ethnic group. He had moved to Paulohi 65 years earlier and had worked with elderly men in their gardens and groves, from whom he had learned to speak Paulohi.^{xxvi} I collected about 1000 lexical items, sample sentences and paradigms—all of which reflected the sound correspondences found in Stresemann (1918); see Collins (2018a:91-93). It is very unlikely that in 1978 there were 50 speakers of the Paulohi language as suggested in Table 2.; a more credible estimate may have been fewer than 5 speakers. Bapak Jamil Patty, a lecturer at the local teachers' college in Masohi, reported that today [15 May 2014] in Desa Elpaputi (Paulohi), there are **no** speakers of the Paulohi language.

Naka'ela. In July 1978 on my third trip to Taniwel on Seram's northwest coast, I was surprised to learn of this language that I had never heard of before. Collins (1982:103) wrote: "Naka'ela was formerly spoken in a few villages (Tanawa, Naka'ela, and Hatu) located between the coastal village of Taniwel...and the mountain strongholds of the Alune group. Earlier authors completely overlooked the existence of this language." In 1978, there were reported to be only three speakers of Naka'ela, a hitherto unknown language; I worked with two of these speakers and collected 760 words and numerous verbal and genitive paradigms; see Collins (2021). "Based on recent information received from Taniwel (Sadrach Latue, personal communication, 27-10-2018), today it is unlikely that there are any speakers of Naka'ela. Indeed, today the remnants of the Naka'ela community speak Ambonese Malay as their home language, although some members of the community may also speak Alune or Wemale. Today Naka'ela is an extinct language of Central Maluku. "In 1978, there were perhaps five speakers of Naka'ela; now there are **none**" (Collins, 2021:157).

Hulung. Approximately 10 km to the east of Taniwel on the northwest shore of Seram, lays the village of Hulung. In 1978, 259 people lived there. "Hulung, not previously mentioned in the literature about Maluku languages, is spoken by only a few people in that village" (Collins, 1982:102). In fact, "*bahasa Hulung hanya dituturkan oleh 4—5 orang di kampung itu*" (Collins, 2018a:78)—all of them aged 60 and above at that time now 40 years ago. According to these speakers, the Hulung village became Christians in 1911 and, as young children, they attended the church-operated primary school, where all students were strictly forbidden to speak the Hulung language, even outside of the classroom. Nonetheless, these enthusiastic elderly villagers provided at least 1500—1700 lexemes and phrases as well as recorded stories. For example, in the second session (21 June 1978) when I asked for the word for 'mushroom', **takuti**, they replied immediately; and then they spontaneously produced the names of ten kinds of edible mushrooms distinguished by shape ("dog's ears"), color ("bright white) and the tree on which it grew. We

may assume that now the language is extinct after these more than forty years. However, there may be rememberers (perhaps similar to the situation Ewing described in Allang?), although it is unlikely that any rememberers can match the wisdom and high spirits of the Hulong speakers of 1978.^{xxvii}

Loun. Kennedy (1955) noted that the traditional foes of the northern Wemale were the “Lisabata, Latea and Lone” groups on the north coast of Seram. Stresemann (1927:49,57,65,69,79,98) included at least a dozen words of the Loun (Kennedy’s “Lone” group) language and included these data in his classification of the languages of Central Maluku. According to local reports, the Loun “village did not survive the 1918 [global virus] epidemic. The few people who claim to be descended from Loun now live in Latea, near Lisabata Timur...” (Collins, 1982:103). In June 1978, I travelled to Latea to meet with these descendants in two separate sessions. I recorded roughly 100 words of the 325 words I asked about, indicating many gaps and uncertainties. But even among the words collected, there were many inconsistencies. For example, I jotted down the word for ‘day’ as **petu**, but in my notes I wrote: “**fetu** was once offered; another one gives the Wemale form **ketu**.” I noted that in the first session (13 June 1978), the resource persons told me the word for ‘swine’ was **fafu** and for ‘stone’ **fatu**; “but on the 17th [the date of the second session] they switch to **papu** and **patu**.” In some cases the vocabulary collected matched the sparse data in Stresemann (1927), for example **malola** ‘husband’, **mapina** ‘wife. I concluded that, although the resource persons remembered some words of Loun, they no longer spoke the language and were, indeed, speakers of Ambonese Malay. The Loun language was already extinct in 1978.

How could these shifts from an ethnic group’s heritage language to Ambonese Malay as the home language (*bahasa ibu*) have happened? Writing about language use in Lohiatata, an Alune village near the south coast of Seram, Florey (in Florey and Bolton, 1997:31) offered this scenario of an early stage in the shift of language allegiance:

Ambonese Malay is the first language of all people born in the new village—that is, those of about thirty years of age and younger. People in this age group no longer speak Alune, although most retain some receptive skills. They are rarely addressed in Alune and, if they are, they always reply in Malay...

Of course, each ethnic language, indeed each village, has its own history of social, cultural, and economic change. The region of Central Maluku has a four-hundred-year-old, documented, colonial history of invasion, resistance, destruction, genocide, enslavement, oppression, and forced population displacement. Since independence, the region has also experienced two armed conflicts, but also rapid social change caused by large scale development of transportation, communication and education (Collins, 2011) as well as a significantly improved health service.^{xxviii}

The eight languages surveyed above were Christian villages; in the late 1970’s there were few Muslim villages with the indicators of language maintenance issues. Collins (2003) at length some of the social and political factors that may have been influential in apparent dichotomy of language survival and language loss. But in the 21st century, this apparent dichotomy is blurring. In Collins (2018b), a brief overview of perceptible changes in the language status of Asilulu, a language spoken in three Muslim villages on the northwest coast of Ambon Island, was provided:

Forty years ago, the Asilulu language spoken by about 10,000 people in three villages on the northwest coast of Ambon Island (Map 3) functioned as the everyday language across all generations. In fact, at that time, many people on the north coast of Seram, such as in the villages of Kasi'e, Sawai and Besi, learned Asilulu to communicate with crews and passengers on the several boats from Asilulu, Ureng and Negeri Lima that linked northern Seram to Ambon city (Collins, 2007). But in Asilulu today, Asiluluans below the age of 25 rarely speak the language; if they speak Asilulu their grasp of the basic morphology and lexicon is limited.

In the last thirty years, the population of Central Maluku has tripled from about 400,000 to 1,221,459 (BPS, 2015). Based on the median age of Indonesians in general of 28.6 years (<http://www.indonesia-investments.com/culture/population/item67>). "Given the patterns of language shift observed in the last twenty years and the overall young population (under 30 years of age) of the region, perhaps 60-70% of the total population, that is 850,000 persons in Central Maluku, are now speakers of Ambonese Malay as their home language" (Collins, 2018b). The shift in language allegiance, so clear-cut in Asilulu-speaking villages, is not unique (Collins, 2018b).

In 1949, besides Paulohi, R. Kennedy chose Tulehu, a Muslim village on the east coast of Ambon Island, as one of his 3-4 principal research sites. Kennedy (1955:264) reported that "*In Tulehu one hundred percent of the population can speak the local language.*" But 55 years later Musgrave (2005:66) wrote:

[L]anguage shift has now commenced in Tulehu and Souw Amana Teru is currently in everyday use in a multilingual community. Ambonese Malay and Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), which is a Malay variety, are also used, and therefore borrowing and code-switching are very common in current language use.

Musgrave and Ewing (2010) have reported similar shifts in language attitude and language transmission in other Muslim villages in eastern Ambon Island. Many people of Central Maluku apparently are not transmitting their heritage languages to their children, whether in Christian or Muslim villages. Even in the remote areas of Buru and eastern Seram, socioeconomic changes have been impacting small communities speaking ethnic languages. Collins (2018a:31-32) reported on the impact of *transmigrasi* projects and illegal mining in Buru. Liswanti et al. (2013) wrote extensively about a range of socioeconomic changes in eastern Seram, ranging from numerous *transmigrasi* projects, road construction, palm oil and cacao planting, teak plantations, the new national park and expanded educational opportunities. All these social and economic changes have influenced the attitudes of the younger generation.^{xxix} Attitudes about language choice are shifting in step with changing social values.

Language diversity in Central Maluku is in rapid decline. This complex ecology of numerous, related languages is facing a contemporary crisis. Collins (2016) commented on the imbalance between economic investment and cultural development:

Pembangunan telah membawa kemajuan yang dinikmati rakyat. Tetapi, malangnya, pembangunan infrastruktur dan perubahan sosial itu tidak diiringi dengan pembangunan dan kesejahteraan bahasa daerah!

Centuries ago, maritime trade accelerated social and economic changes as well as opened up new channels of communication. Today, perhaps in part because of accelerated modes of contemporary communication, we are witnessing the same processes of change moving more rapidly and more comprehensively across oceans and seas beyond shorelines to the hinterlands. We, scholars and practitioners from diverse fields need to formulate our professional responses, both individually and jointly, to address the reality of language endangerment and extinction.

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ⁱ Let me express my thanks to the organizing committee at Universitas Hasanuddin for inviting me to participate in Kongres Internasional Masyarakat Linguistik Indonesia. I am confident that despite all the complications in these difficult times, the event will be a success. I am grateful to the National University of Malaysia for my appointment as Distinguished International Professor at the Institute of Ethnic Studies. I hope my description of the situation of the endangered languages of the minority ethnic communities in Central Maluku can contribute to our understanding of ethnicity and language. Reviewing my fieldwork materials from forty years ago and contacting my friends in Central Maluku to ask questions reminded me of how much I owe to them and all the people in Maluku who have shared their lives and knowledge with me for all these years. Terima kasih!

ⁱⁱ Indonesia's neighbour, "Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the world's most linguistically diverse nation, where ... 9 million people speak ... 840 languages" (Kik 2021).

ⁱⁱⁱ Readers should note that this name, "Central Maluku" used here denotes a geographic region that differs from the boundaries of the contemporary political unit (*kabupaten*) that is officially called "*Maluku Tengah*" (Central Maluku)

^{iv} The Dutch East Indies Company (*Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*) usually referred to as the VOC was the "armed politico-commercial organization" (Israel 1989:411), founded in the Netherlands in 1602.

^v At that time, the local languages were considered by Rumphius as mutually intelligible; see Collins (2012b).

^{vi} The only apparent exception is the language spoken in the village of Laha at the mouth of Ambon Bay; see (Collins 1980).

^{vii} "*Wel is waar hebben alle christennegorijen in de afdeeling Ambon, behalve Alang, Hatoe en Liliboi, zoo ook de negorij Tiouw en Saparoea [eiland Saparoea], hare landtaal geheel voor het Maleisch laten varen, maar overigens is de oude bahasa nog in gebruik.*"

^{viii} Apparently, van Ekris (1864-1865:65) wrote specifically about one village: "*Ht. staat voor Hatawano, de noordkust van Saparoea. Daar is het gebruik der landtaal bij de Islamieten regel, bij de Christenen uitzondering.*"

^{ix} For a language to be extinct, with not even "rememberers", when Ludeking arrived in Ambon in 1861, suggests that the heritage languages of those villages had already fallen into complete disuse perhaps two or three generations earlier, that is sometime in the mid- or late eighteenth century. Collins (2003) discussed in detail some of the factors probably impacting language allegiance in Central Maluku.

^x The columns labelled "Batoemerah" and "Waay" are the names of villages on Ambon Island where the indigenous languages are now extinct. The status of the language of Allang will be discussed below.

^{xi} For example, the languages of "Bissy" and "Passanea" were each considered "*zoo goed als uitgestorven is.*"

^{xii} Not only is the Baturah language now extinct but there are languages that only Wallace documented, such as Awaiya on Elpaput Bay, Seram that is now extinct.

^{xiii} Pada tahun 1870 van Hoëvell mulai bertugas sebagai *controleur* di residensi Ambon. Selama hampir lima tahun dia berdinan di Maluku Tengah dan sambal bertugas dia mengumpulkan data dan kemudian menyusun kompilasi catatannya. Kurang jelas metode pengumpulan data tetap sepertinya memang ada kwesioneer. Lihat van Hoëvell (1877:4-5) dan Collins (2007b:xxxii-xxxiii).

^{xiv} The village of Paulohi was destroyed by an earthquake followed by a tsunami on 30 September 1899 (Verbeek 1900); 94% of the villagers died on that day. Markus Mailpou was across the bay on that day and lived to assist Stresemann. Today there are no known speakers of the Paulohi language (Collins 2017c).

^{xv} As Collins (2017c) suggested:

Mungkin karena bahasa daerah di Maluku Tengah biasanya memperlihatkan sistem fleksi verbal, partikel nominal yang menunjukkan status tunggal atau jamak, dan kataganti yang kadang depan kadang di belakang untuk menandakan pemilikan (Collins 1983[a], 2007), kerangka tatabahasa Latin tidak mengelirukan.

^{xvi} Collins (1983a:4): "... Dyen [1978a] presented a paper in defence of the membership of two Maluku languages, Kei and Kamarian [Seram], in the first order subgroup of Proto-Austronesian which he calls Hesperonesian."

^{xvii} See Collins (2019b) for a discussion of the serious errors in Mahsun's (2008) and Mukhamdanah's (2015) efforts at classifying and understanding the languages of Central Maluku.

^{xviii} “The administrative requirement to use Ambonese Malay dealing with the colonial government, its agencies, and anyone other than the inhabitants of Sepa and Tamilouw must have led to growing fluency in this language from 1850 onwards. This has increased greatly with Indonesian independence and with schooling in the 1970s, which is conducted entirely in the national language.”

^{xix} See Collins (2012a) for details about Payapo’s analysis of the Luhu language. Abdullah Payapo, the first Indonesian linguist of Central Maluku languages and a member of the Luhu ethnic community, died in an automobile accident in Surabaya in 1984.

^{xx} It is odd that Travis (1986:13) did not grasp the status of Laha as a separate language when issues of intelligibility (communication) were explicitly discussed in Collins (1980). Instead, he “decided” Laha was a separate language based on what the computers told him about the 210 words someone else had collected there.

^{xxi} However, the sources for the estimates of the number of speakers listed in Table 1 are not entirely clear. Sometime in 1978 I was asked by the Atlas editors to provide information on the communities I had visited during my doctoral fieldwork in Central Maluku; in addition to the data I provided, the team in Canberra also received information from Indonesia’s *Pusat Bahasa* (National Language Agency). The result seems to be that in almost all cases the number of speakers was over-estimated, although in the case of Allang and Kamarian apparently under-estimated.

^{xxii} See Collins (1980) for evidence of similar reinterpretations of the inflectional system among younger speakers in Laha.

^{xxiii} Ewing (2010:123) refers to these constructions in Allang as “undergoer intransitive clauses”.

^{xxiv} At some eras in the long history of this village, Paulohi and Samasuru formed two separate villages speaking the same language. In 1949, the memory of that division persisted and there were two other distinct units of Paulohi village, Mani and Pokolowoni, both of which were peopled by members of the Wemale ethnic group.

^{xxv} Kennedy commented several times on the secretiveness of the Paulohi community and their unwillingness to talk about their traditions. The issue of “language ownership” arises. Perhaps villagers were focusing on the absence of ethnic Paulohi who spoke Paulohi, and only reluctantly suggested a Wemale man who spoke Paulohi?

^{xxvi} In 1949 although there were few elderly people, “... most of the old folk speak it [bahasa tanah] only” (Kennedy 1955:121). He also observed: “The Pokolowani-Mani [Wemale] can understand the bahasa tanah of Paulohi-Samasuru, but not vice versa” (Kennedy 1955:138). Perhaps the elderly Paulohi-speaking population had interacted and worked with the Wemale population as they had with the Paulohi speaker I worked with in 1978.

^{xxvii} Note that Dr. S. Touwe, p.c., 30 April 2016, reported there are still speakers of the Hulung language. Again, the issue of “language ownership” and the measure of language competence may be involved.

^{xxviii} Readers are advised to read Kennedy’s description of diseases and life expectancy in Paulohi in 1949 (Kennedy 1955:117-118).

^{xxix} Liswanti et al. (2013:37) “...[T]he community leaders in Aketernate and Seti explained that the younger generation no longer wishes to work in traditional agriculture. The younger generation’s attitude to work is changing; they are looking for instant and secure income. With more companies setting up business in the area, there are now more employment opportunities in addition to traditional agriculture. More people are working as laborers, traders, teachers or are self-employed.”