

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Kokota language community and its locus

Ooe Kokota is spoken on the island of Santa Isabel in the Solomon Islands.¹ The Solomon Islands consists of a double chain of seven large islands along with a number of smaller islands. The largest island, Bougainville, is geographically part of the Solomon Islands but is politically part of Papua New Guinea. The rest constitute the Solomon Islands nation. Santa Isabel is the longest of these islands, at over 200 kilometers in length, and is the middle island in the northern side of the double chain. (See Map 1) Despite its size it has the lowest population density in the Solomon Islands, with 14 603 inhabitants in 1986.² This low population is due at least in part to the effects of nineteenth century headhunting by the more warlike peoples of the New Georgia group. The peoples of Santa Isabel were themselves warlike, but apparently less so than their enemies, and now have a reputation in the Solomon Islands as peaceful and friendly people. Christianity began making significant inroads on Santa Isabel towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the Kokota had been Christianised for some time by the time one of the first white owned plantations on Santa Isabel was established on their land in 1918.³ They are today moderate but committed adherents to the Anglican Church of Melanesia, to which almost all the people of Santa Isabel belong.

Speakers of *Ooe Kokota* refer to themselves as Kokota people, and the language name means 'Kokota talk'. The name Kokota itself refers to a currently uninhabited area of coastal Santa Isabel between Goveo and Buala, the provincial capital, and also to a river that enters the sea at that point. The word *kota* in present day *Ooe Kokota* means 'to go ashore' or 'to land', and *Kokota* is a reduplicated form of this root. Present day speakers of *Ooe Kokota* (henceforth 'Kokota') live in three villages: two, Goveo and Sisiga, on the north coast, and one, Hurepelo, on the opposite side of the island on the south coast (see Map 2.). In addition there is a small community of Kokota speakers in the national capital Honiara, largely in the Kukum area.

During the headhunting period numbers of people lived in the mountainous interior away from the risk of attack by sea. After the end of systematic headhunting at the beginning of the twentieth century these populations dispersed to the coasts on either side of the island, leaving the interior uninhabited apart from the eastern third of the island. As a result of this population shift the languages of Santa Isabel are spoken in roughly corresponding areas on each side of the island (see maps 3 and 4). The relative proximity of Goveo and Sisiga mean that contact is maintained regularly between these two villages. Travel to and from Hurepelo is a far more considerable matter so less contact is maintained. Apart from the hinterland behind the Maringe lagoon, almost all travel on Santa Isabel is by boat. There are almost no roads, and in the Kokota speaking areas paths extend beyond the village only as far as local coconut and betel nut plantations along the coast and gardens in the hills behind the villages. People do not travel across the island by foot in this area, so travel to Hurepelo involves a boat trip of at least two days.

Today the population of the three Kokota speaking villages is probably in excess of 900. The normal figure given for the number of Kokota speakers is 170, taken from Tryon and Hackman (1983:20). This in turn seems to have been derived from Whiteman and Simons (1978:5), who give the number of speakers as 166, a figure they say is based on the 1976 census. This figure appears to have been low, even at the time, and is now more than 20 years out of date. The figure of 900 was reached by a comparison of 1976 and 1986 census figures and an extrapolation of population growth. How this was calculated is discussed in Appendix 1.

¹ Before independence the name of the island was spelled Santa Ysabel.

² This figure is from the 1986 census, and includes only Solomon Islanders. A further 13 non-Solomon Islanders were also resident on the island at the time.

³ The activities of the plantation owner are described in Boutilier (1975).

Kokota remains the normal language of communication in all three Kokota villages. It is used for almost all purposes, the exceptions being in primary school, where English is the official medium of instruction and Solomons Pijin is often used, and in church, where sermons given by non-Kokota speaking priests are given in Pijin. Outside school children use Kokota almost exclusively. This coupled with the rapidly increasing population suggests that the language is not in immediate danger of extinction despite its low number of speakers. A number of Pijin words have been borrowed into the language, as have a number of words from the two dominant Isabel languages Maringe and Zabana. This is, however, not a new phenomenon. It is clear that borrowing between the island's languages was the norm before the arrival of Europeans.

Zabana, and particularly Maringe, are spreading as their much larger populations of speakers expand and move into new areas of the island. The language formerly spoken immediately to the west of Kokota, known as Laghu in the literature (see below), became extinct in 1984, having been supplanted by intermarriage and population expansion by Zabana. If Kokota is at risk it is from a neighbouring language, almost certainly Maringe, not from Pijin. According to Whiteman and Simons (1978:6) the populations of Bolotei and Toelegu, west of Sisiga, and Dedeu, west of Hurepelo, are Maringe speakers. More recently a settlement of Maringe speakers has been established on the coast between Goveo and Sisiga. This encroachment of Maringe speakers may be expected to continue. A number of Kokota and Blablanga speakers have expressed the opinion that one day everyone on Isabel will speak Maringe, an opinion also reported from around the island by Whiteman and Simons (1978:6).

1.2 Previous work on other languages of Santa Isabel

The earliest published information on a language spoken on Santa Isabel was a wordlist of Bughotu produced by Gabelentz (1873). However, although located on the southeastern tip of Santa Isabel, Bughotu is not closely related to the island's other languages, which form a subgroup excluding it. It will be ignored for the purposes of this discussion. The earliest published information on a language of the Santa Isabel subgroup was by Codrington (1885:555-559), who provided a grammatical sketch of Gao. Ray (1926) gave an overview (1926:525-529), and grammatical sketches of three of the languages: Maringe ("The Bush Language of Ysabel" (1926:529-532)), Zazao (as Kilokaka (1926:532-534)), and Zabana (as Kia (1926:534-538)). A Zazao (Kilokaka) wordlist and small collection of phrases was collected before 1915, and used as a source by Ray. This was published as Napu (1953), but is of extremely limited use as the editor, Lanyon-Orgill, retained Napu's original Mota translations, deciding not to supplement them with English translation. A small wordlist of Maringe is given in a (1968) British Solomon Islands Protectorate, Lands and Surveys Department booklet, but no substantial work on any Isabel language was produced until research was begun on Maringe in the 1970s and Zabana in the 1980s.

One strand of the work on Maringe was directed towards the translation of religious material. This resulted initially in Whiteman and Simons' (1978) survey of Isabel languages, followed by Bosma's (1981b) recommendations for a standardised alphabet, containing wordlists in Maringe (as Holo) and Zabana. A collection of Maringe texts (Bosma 1981a) and a brief dictionary (Bosma 1984) followed.

Maringe language religious publications had begun earlier, with a Liturgy published in 1934. Three further texts were published in the mid-1970s, and translation work continued throughout the 1980s, culminating in a Maringe New Testament published in 1994.

In addition, research carried out in the mid-1970s resulted in a substantial dictionary (White, Kokhonigita and Pulomana 1988), which includes a substantial grammatical sketch. A number of anthropological works appeared during this period, including White (1978), and papers including texts in Maringe by Maringe authors including Lagusu (1986), Vilasa (1986) and Naramana (1987). Aspects of Maringe clause structure were subject to analysis by Ross (1988:240-247), a topic which is also approached by Corston (1996) and Palmer (forthcoming (b)). A further brief grammatical sketch (White 1995) largely repeats some material from the published dictionary.

Research on Zabana began during the mid-1980s and resulted in a short dictionary (Ama and Fitzsimons 1985) and a grammar (Fitzsimons 1989).

1.3 Previous work on Kokota

Virtually nothing was known about the Kokota language prior to the present research project. A word list of 320 lexical items is presented by Tryon and Hackman (1983) as part of their comparison of Solomon Islands languages. Due to the limited data available in the preparation of that pioneering work there are a number of errors in the list. Prenasalisation is shown with several instances of voiced plosives when no prenasalisation occurs in Kokota (or other Santa Isabel languages). Some terms from neighbouring languages have crept in, particularly from the influential neighbouring Zabana language. Other terms are in fact phrases ('because' is given as "neheve", actually *ne heve* 'what is it?'; 'time' is given as "kaiaheve", actually *kaia heve* 'at the what?'). Others display morphological complexity. Some terms are simple errors resulting from the inevitable problems in the collection of data in the field (for example "hmuhmui" is listed for both 'wait' and 'wet' - the form *mhuhmui* in fact meaning only 'be wet'). Despite these problems, this was the only published information on the language prior to the present project. Further, I am aware of no unpublished manuscript material on the language.

One published document exists in the language. This anonymous monolingual booklet, *Buka nhau blahi ka o'oe Kokota* 'Book of the Holy Communion in the Kokota language', contains a translation of the Church of Melanesia Liturgy. It was published in very small numbers in Honiara and is long out of print. Prior to commencing my research I desktop published a facsimile edition in 1994. The translation contained in the booklet has a number of grammatical and lexical inaccuracies and numerous non-Kokota words, again typically from the Zabana language. The original translation was apparently done by a native Zabana speaker for whom Kokota was a second language.

1.4 The present study

The present study is the result of field research carried out by the author in Goveo village. After an initial visit to the village in January 1994 I returned to Goveo for six months from June to November 1994. A substantial period of analysis followed. In February and March 1998 a follow up visit of six weeks allowed further research to be carried out and various issues in the grammar to be clarified.

Several smaller studies of aspects of the language have resulted from the project prior to the completion of this grammar. A discussion of the status of the language's voiceless sonorants appeared in 1999 (Palmer 1999), and a grammatical sketch of the language (Palmer forthcoming (a)) is also due to appear in 1999. A paper was presented on the former topic at the 1998 ALS conference. Other conference presentations have included discussions of agreement (1995), transitivity (1995), spatial reference (1997), and stress assignment (1998).

The present work attempts to present a moderately detailed overview of the grammar of the language, including its phonology, and its phrase, clause and sentence level syntax. Particular attention has been paid to the stress regime, which is complex and in a process of change; to the system of possession; and to argument structure.

Like most Oceanic languages Kokota has limited morphological complexity. Consequently there is no separate chapter on morphology. Aspects of the morphology are discussed in conjunction with other areas of the grammar to which they relate syntactically or functionally.

This work is concerned with the structure of the language up to the level of the sentence. Consequently, apart from pragmatic issues with morphosyntactic implications (such as topicalisation and focushood), discourse level phenomena are not discussed. Equally, sociolinguistic phenomena and issues such as multilingualism, language mixing and code switching are treated as outside the scope of the work.

As all field research was carried out among residents of one village, it has not been possible to investigate whether dialect differentiation exists. Consequently the dialectology of Kokota is not discussed.

1.5 Isabel languages in the Austronesian family

The Austronesian family consists of a series of right branching subgroups, largely reflecting successive migrations south and east by speakers of languages which in turn became the protolanguages for lower order subgroups (as Figure 1.1 shows). It appears that at most levels the languages which did not split off in this way do not themselves form a discrete subgroup descended from a common ancestor which excluded the emigrant language. Instead the emigrant typically represented one of a series of closely related languages. (Ross 1995:67) This appears to be the case with Oceanic, the substantial subgroup containing all Austronesian languages east of the Jayapura in Irian Jaya, including those of Melanesia, Polynesia, and almost all of Micronesia.

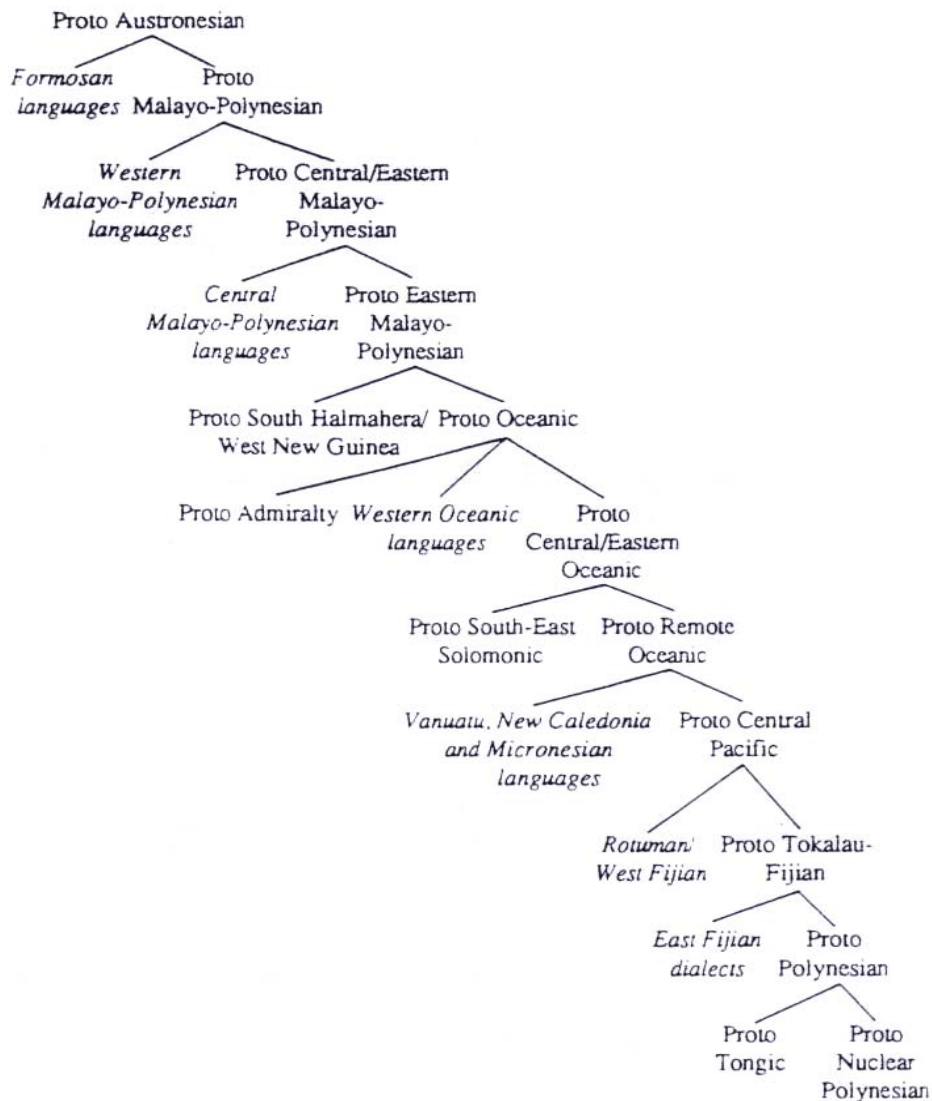


Figure 1.1: The diversification of Austronesian languages. (After Ross 1995:68)

The Admiralty Islands family clearly forms a single subgroup of Oceanic, with a common ancestor. Two further groups, the St Matthias family, and Yapese on its own, appear to also be primary subgroups of Oceanic. Whether the Central/Eastern Oceanic languages form a single subgroup is not clear, however some evidence does suggest it reflects a linkage. (Lynch, Ross and Crowley forthcoming: Chapter 5) Whatever the exact status of the group, it appears to reflect a relatively rapid migration away from the Oceanic homeland in the Bismark Archipelago. Central Eastern Oceanic languages occur in the eastern Solomon Islands, and beyond in Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

The remaining Oceanic languages may be grouped together as Western Oceanic, a linkage with shared innovations and descended from a dialect network. (Ross 1988:386-392; 1995:92) While a number of innovations are shared by more than one Western Oceanic language subgroup, none are shared by all. Western Oceanic therefore represents a number of language groupings descended from a dialect network which did not emigrate rapidly further afield but slowly spread out throughout New Britain and New Ireland, coastal New Guinea, and the northwestern Solomon Islands (including Bougainville).

The descendants of the languages carried west in this slower dispersal now comprise the cohesive Papuan Tip cluster, and the less clearly unitary North New Guinea cluster, the latter probably including the Sami/Jayapura Bay group further west in Irian Jaya. (Ross 1995:89, 92-93) To the east the languages of New Ireland, Bougainville and the western Solomon Islands form the Meso-Melanesian cluster. As Figure 1.2 shows, the common ancestor of the Meso-Melanesian languages initially split into the ancestors of the Willaumez chain of northern New Britain, and of Bali and Vitu, and Proto New Ireland. The latter in turn gave rise to the Lavongai/Nalik network and Tabar and Madak chains of northern New Ireland, the languages of southern New Ireland, and Proto North-West Solomonic. (Ross 1988:257-314)

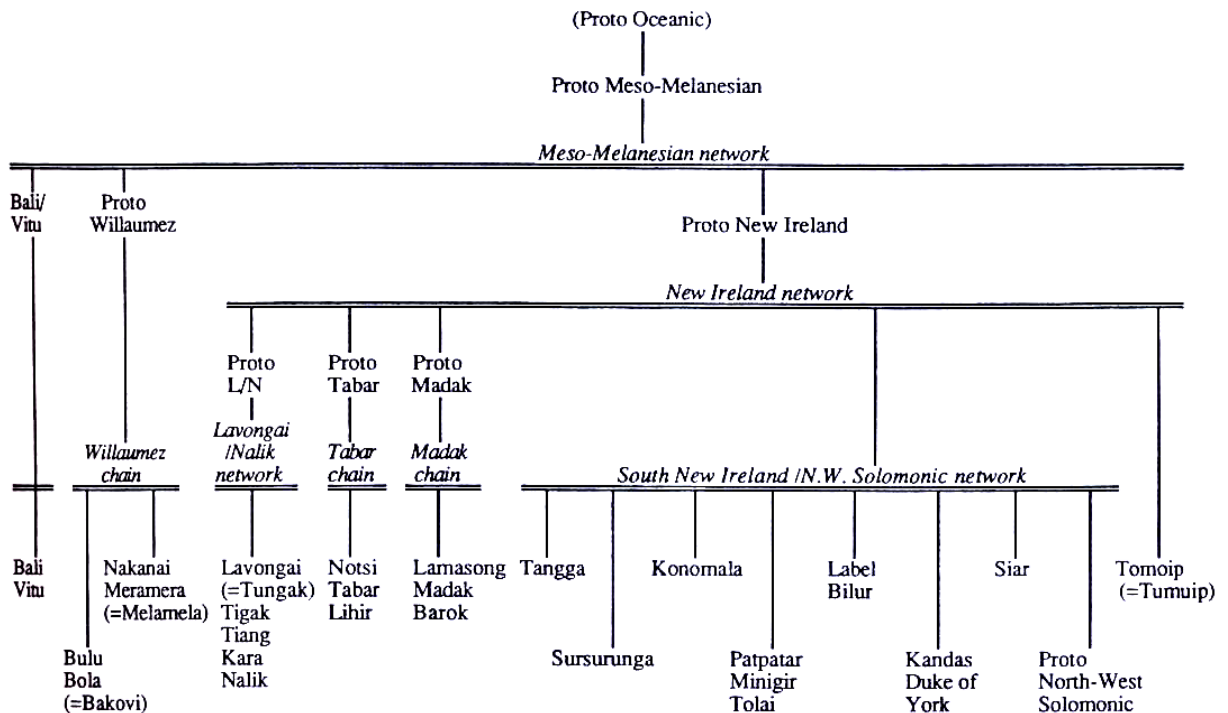


Figure 1.2: The Meso-Melanesian genetic tree. (After Ross 1988:258)

The North-West Solomonic (NWS) group itself comprises the languages of Bougainville and its offshore islands, and the languages of Choiseul, the New Georgia group, and Santa Isabel, as Figure 1.3 illustrates. (Ross 1988:213-256) A notable exception is Bughotu. Although spoken on Santa Isabel, Bughotu is a South-East Solomonic language most closely related to Gela. Isabel represents the easternmost extension of Western Oceanic languages, and the boundary with Maringe and Gao on one side and Bughotu on the other forms part of the boundary between Western Oceanic and the Central/Eastern Oceanic subgroup (the rest of the boundary lying between the New Georgia group and Guadalcanal).

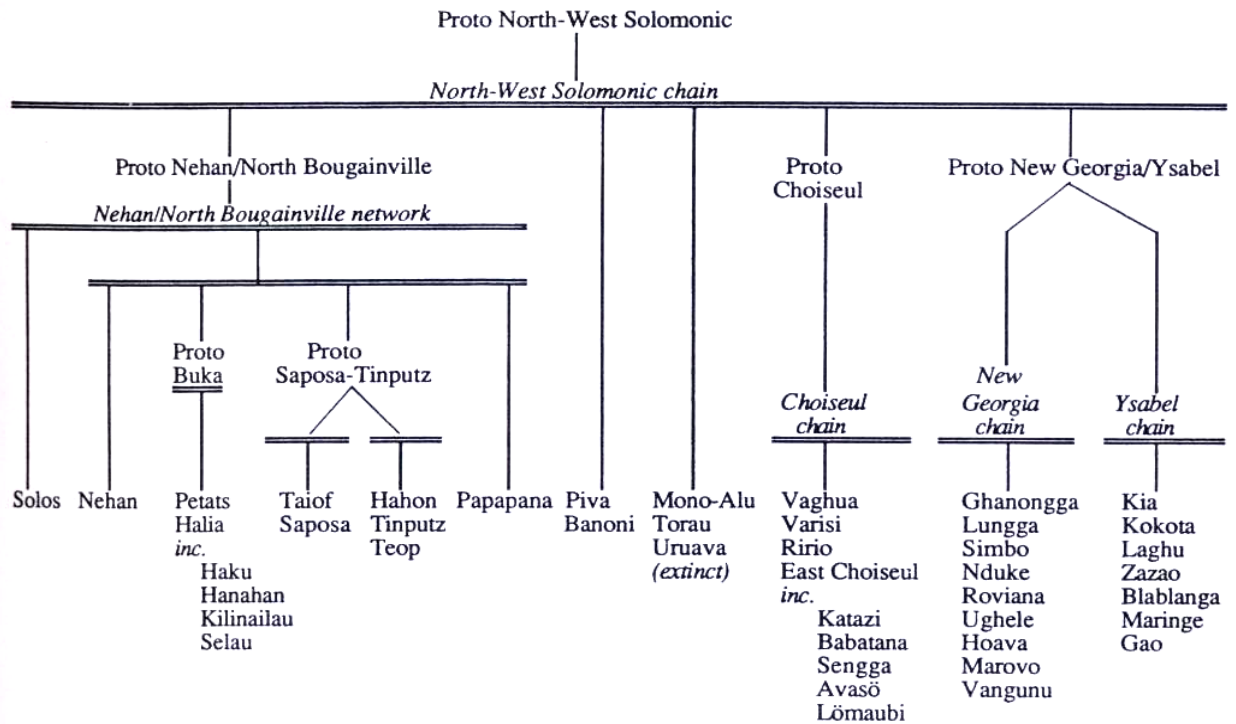


Figure 1.3: The North-West Solomonic genetic tree. (After Ross 1988:217)

There is little doubt that the languages of Choiseul form a first order subgroup of NWS. The evidence is less clear about the New Georgia and Isabel languages. Each clearly forms a subgroup in its own right, but it is not yet entirely clear whether these represent separate first order subgroups, or combine to form branches of a single first order subgroup of NWS. Ross (1988:224-225, 240-247) finds one idiosyncratic lexical innovation linking the New Georgia and Isabel subgroups, and identifies syntactic evidence which appears to link them more closely than to other NWS languages, however Ross (pers. comm.) is of the opinion that this kind of syntactic evidence is not conclusive. His findings lead to further discussion of the syntactic data in Corston (1996:57-65) and Palmer (forthcoming (b)), but the results as far as the question of a New Georgia/Isabel subgroup remain inconclusive.

Whether the New Georgia and Isabel subgroups form a higher order combined subgroup or not, each represents a subgroup. A number of phonological and idiosyncratic lexical innovations are shared by the Isabel languages (Ross (1988:225)), justifying positing a common ancestor, Proto Santa Isabel.⁴ The members of the Santa Isabel subgroup are Zabana, Laghu, Kokota, Blablanga (including Zazao, see below), Maringe, and Gao.

1.6 Redrawing the language map of Santa Isabel

The standard language map of Santa Isabel (Tryon and Hackman (1983:23), Wurm and Hattori (1981: Map 15), Ross (1988:216)) is repeated here as Map 3. My own field research suggests that the positions of Laghu, and consequently Zabana, as well as Blablanga and Zazao, need revising. In addition some corrections need to be made relating to the boundaries of Maringe, Gao and Bughotu.

1.6.1 Losing Laghu

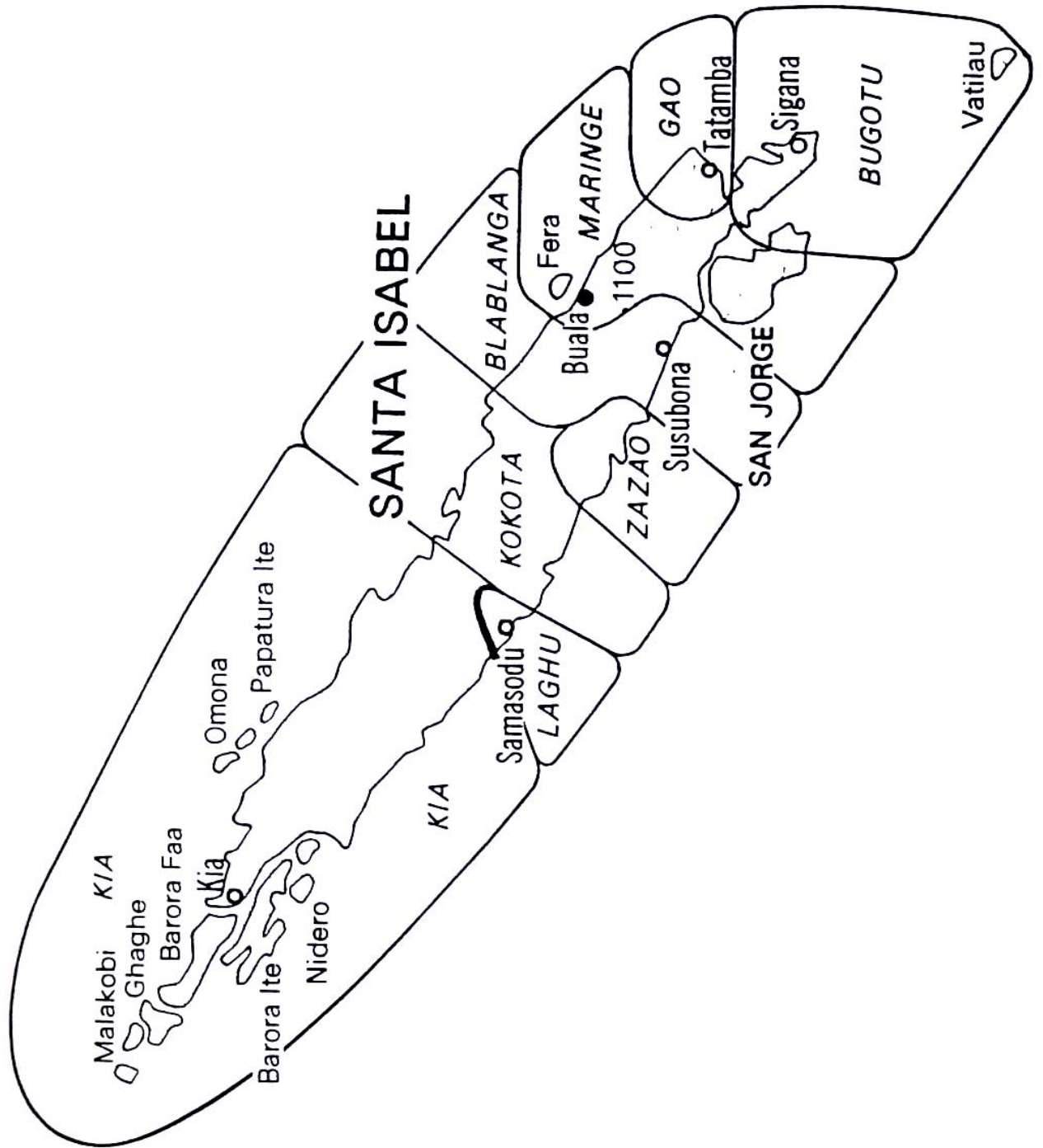
Laghu appears on the standard language map of Santa Isabel as the language of the village of Samasodu. This is quite misleading, both in the implication that it is the language of Samasodu, and in that its range is limited to Samasodu. The existing standard maps are based on Tryon and Hackman (1983), which was the result of a major investigation into the at that stage little understood language position in the Solomon Islands. Tryon and Hackman's conclusions were based on field research carried out by Jacques Guy in 1977, except for the number of speakers, given as 5. This is taken from Whiteman and Simons (1978:7), who identified only five remaining speakers in 1977 - three in Samasodu, and two in Baolo on the opposite side of the island. Guy himself located three very elderly speakers in Samasodu, none of whom still used the language, and one dubious informant in Baolo (Guy pers. comm.). Samasodu and Baolo were at that time, and remain, Zabana speaking villages.

However it is clear from Guy's research, and from my own informants on Isabel, that in earlier times Laghu was the language of both Samasodu and Baolo. It was spoken across a slice of the island, much as Kokota is today, between the regions in which Zabana and Kokota were spoken. In fact the language is referred to by Kokota and at least some Zabana speakers as the Hotana language, and its speakers as the Hotana people, cognate with synchronic Kokota *hotai* 'middle', the *-na* presumably reflecting either 3SG possessor or *ana* 'that'. Whiteman and Simons report Katava as an alternate name to Laghu, being "the village and area in the middle bush from which the original speakers came." (1978:7)

Due to the expansion of Zabana speakers and intermarriage Laghu is now extinct. The last speaker, an elderly woman living in Baolo, died in about 1984. It would be accurate to represent Laghu as an extinct language formerly spoken in a band across the island covering Samasodu and Baolo, within the modern Zabana speaking region.

It is hard to know very much about Laghu. Of Guy's three informants in Samasodu, two were senile. The third was reliable but had not spoken Laghu for forty years and did not remember very much (Guy pers. comm.). Guy's informant in Baolo appeared unreliable, providing contradictory information. From what data he managed to gather, however, it appears that Laghu/Hotana had consonant clusters and voiceless sonorants, as do the other Isabel languages except Zabana. Two lexical items in Tryon and Hackman's wordlist suggest the presence of aspirated stops, as in the other Isabel languages excepting Zabana and Kokota, however it seems likely that these are errors. As might be expected, lexically Laghu resembles Zabana and Kokota more than other Isabel languages.

⁴ Ross (1988) refers to this subgroup as the Ysabel chain, reflecting the earlier spelling of the island's name. I have chosen to refer to it as the Santa Isabel subgroup, and the ancestor as Proto Santa Isabel.



Map 3: The standard language map of Santa Isabel. (After Wurm and Hattori 1981)

1.6.2 Rethinking Blablanga and Zazao

The standard language map represents Blablanga and Zazao as separate languages. This conclusion is based on Tryon and Hackman's (1983:464) lexicostatistical comparison of 192 lexical items from the two communalects. Their finding was that the two shared 78.6% cognates. Following standard procedure, their cutoff for the distinction between dialects and separate languages is 81% cognation, and the two fall only slightly below dialect status. However, two factors need to be taken into consideration, both related to the data source for Zazao. The wordlist used for the comparison was drawn from Napu (1953). However Napu's data was collected some time before 1915, seventy years before the data used for the Blablanga list. Secondly, as mentioned in 1.3, the Napu data was originally collected with translation into Mota, not English. English translations may only be reached by dragging the data through Mota with the assistance of Codrington and Palmer's (1896) dictionary. These two factors make this comparison particularly unreliable.

In fact speakers of both Blablanga and the communalect of Kilokaka claim they are variants of the same language, together distinct from other neighbouring languages such as Kokota and Maringe.

Evidence from informants suggest that the language has three dialects. An informant from Sogolona village near Popoheo reported that the language differed in three locations: the area around Popoheo, the area around Susubona, and the area around Kilokaka. The communalects in these areas are mutually intelligible, but differ in some sounds and some words. He reports that the Popoheo dialect is used in the villages of Popoheo, Ghojoruru, Sogolona, Hovukoilo, Holokama and Kolosori. The Susubona dialect area includes Susubona and Ghalatha, and covers the currently uninhabited Tuarughu village site. In addition a group of Susubona speakers form a minority community in Hovukoilo in the Popoheo speaking region. The Kilokaka dialect is spoken throughout the region from Kilokaka to Biluro, including Fajaghalia, Hiroleghu and Matotoku. This informant estimates the population of Popoheo to be about 300, Hovukoilo about 400-500, and the other villages about 100 each. If these figures are correct the total number of speakers of the language would then be about 1100. Information gathered from two further informants, one from Popoheo and one from Kilokaka, separately confirm that the communalect of Popoheo and that of Kilokaka belong to the same language, with some sound differences.

Whiteman and Simons' (1978) survey proceeds from the standard language divisions so does not treat Kilokaka as a dialect of Blablanga. However their findings (1978:8-9) in fact support the view that it is. In response to a question about how different the other "language" is from their own, speakers of Zazao said that Blablanga differs only in the sound of words, while Blablanga speakers said that Zazao differs in the sound of words and uses some different words. Whiteman and Simons' findings also support the view that dialect differences exist in Blablanga, and identify two dialects on the south coast (1978:5). However their south coast dialect information conflicts with information from my informant. Whiteman and Simons claim that one dialect is based on the villages of Ghove and Momodu. This is outside the area my informant gives for Blablanga. Tryon and Hackman's lexicostatistical analysis also casts doubt on Ghove's place in Blablanga, giving 66.9% cognates for Ghove and Blablanga, but 83.3% cognate with the neighbouring Maringe speaking Leleghia, and 83.9% with Maringe speaking Kmagha on the opposite side of the island, leading them to place Ghove as a dialect of Maringe (1983:464). Whiteman and Simons' other south coast dialect area corresponds with my own informants views, with the exception that they place Biluro within it, while my informant places it with Kilokaka. Regardless of the precise position of Biluro, it may be concluded that Blablanga comprises three dialects: one on the north coast, one in the area around Kilokaka on the south coast, and one in the area around Susubona and Ghalatha, also on the south coast.

The language is known to its speakers as Bla, Blabla, or Blablanga. The Blablanga form /bla/ is a limiter (with a similar function to the Pijin *nomo*), and occurs with high frequency in the language.⁵ The name of the language is reported by speakers as meaning 'the language with "bla" in it'. This name is used by speakers of all three dialects (when asked what language was spoken in Kilokaka, my Kilokaka informant replied "Bla"). White et al refer to the language as Blabla, and speakers tend to refer to it as Bla or Blabla. However it appears that these are regarded as short versions of the full name Blablanga. Consequently that

⁵ *Bla* fulfills the same function in Kokota.

full name will be retained here.⁶ Both Whiteman and Simons (1978:5) and my own informant suggest that Zazao, the name given to the Kilokaka communalect on the standard map, is in fact the name of a region of the interior where speakers of Blablanga lived prior to their dispersal to both coasts after the end of headhunting. Zazao is not used by speakers to refer to any of the three dialects, so it seems inappropriate to use it to refer to the dialect of Kilokaka. Simons and Whiteman (1978:5) report that speakers of the Susubona dialect refer to their dialect as "Goi", 'you'. In the absence of similar information on the other dialects, I propose to refer to them by the largest villages in each area: Popoheo-Hovukoilo, Kilokaka, and Susubona.

1.6.3 A revised language map of Santa Isabel

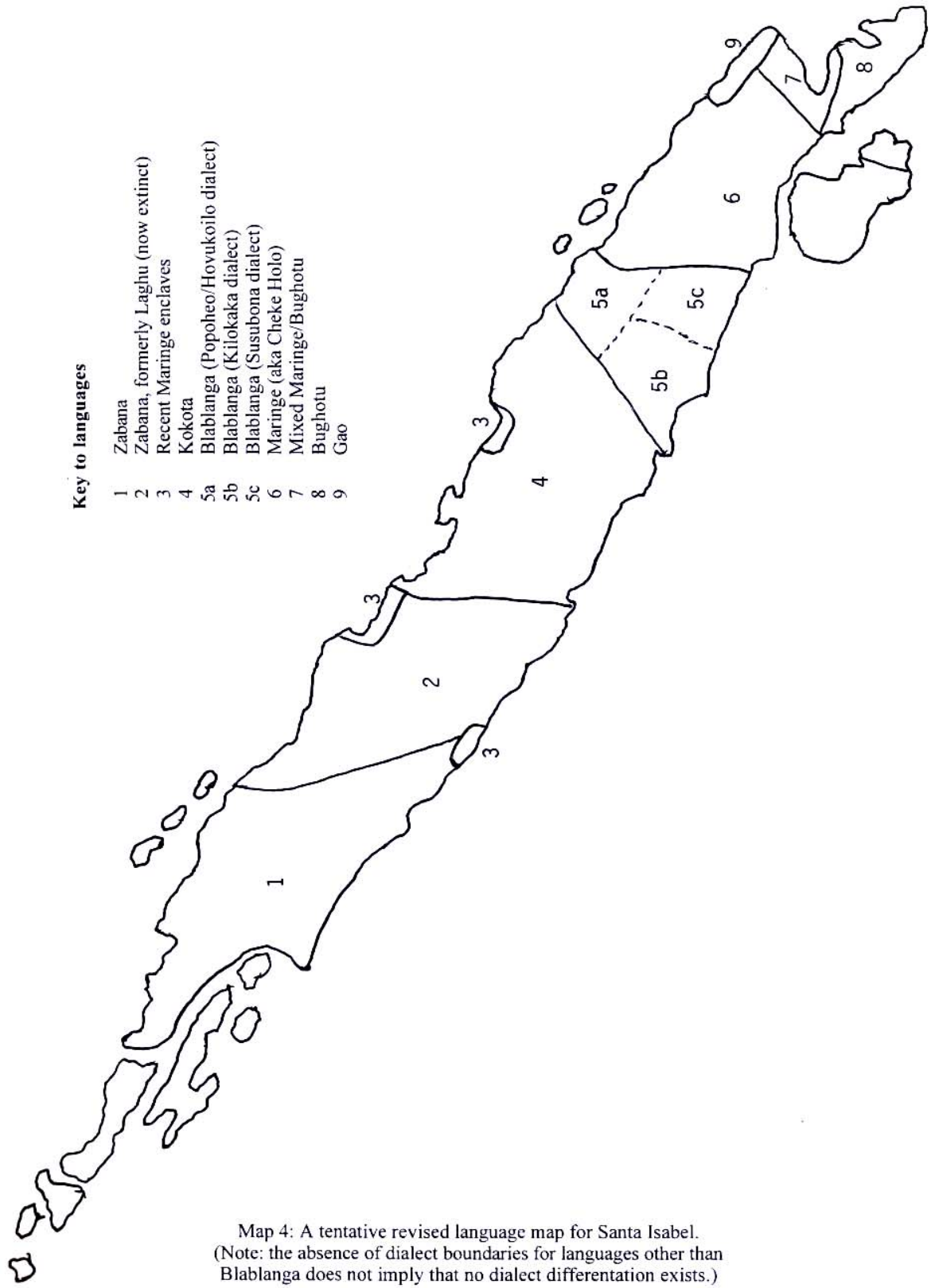
Simons and Whiteman (1978:4) and White et al (1988:viii) recognise the extinction of Laghu by excluding it from their language maps, however both retain the standard distinction between Zazao and Blablanga. A tentative revised map is presented here (Map 4) which follows these in recognising the loss of Laghu, but captures its former presence. The revised map also captures the Blablanga dialect situation.

The map does not show dialect distinctions for Kokota. It seems clear that the communalects of Goveo and Sisiga have no significant differences. Speakers report that there are no sound differences between these communalects and that of Hurepelo, despite the distance. However, I have not been able to carry out any research on speakers from that village. In the absence of evidence that there are dialect differences none are represented on the map. This applies also to Zabana, whose speakers report no regional variation in the language. However the absence of dialect boundaries is not to be taken as a firm claim that none exist. The same is particularly true for Maringe. Indeed, Tryon and Hackman's wordlists for Ghove,⁷ Kmagha, Leleghia and Tataba suggest that dialect differences do exist. This agrees with Bosma's (1981b:7) observation that "there are some minor dialect differences" between the language spoken in the Maringe and Hograno regions on either side of the island. In the absence of evidence about the location of dialect boundaries for Maringe, these have been omitted from this map. However it may be assumed that there are several dialects, at least two on the south coast - one including Ghove and one including Leleghia; and probably at least two on the north coast - one including Kmagha, and a likely additional dialect further west on the Maringe lagoon itself.

Evidence on the position of the former provincial capital Tataba is mixed. On the standard language map the Gao speaking region encompasses it. However, my own informant, a former provincial Premier, claimed it was a Bughotu village, while Tryon and Hackman's (1983:464) lexicostatistical figures show Tataba as having 86.7% cognates with Kmagha and 87.2% with Leleghia, placing it firmly as a Maringe speaking village. Whiteman and Simons (1978:7) implicitly exclude Tataba from the Gao speaking region which they identify as a region of the north coast from Tausese to Floakora point. They go on to identify the region from Raja to Tanade, which includes Tataba, as containing a mix of Maringe and Bughotu speakers. Tryon and Hackman's figures (Tataba is Maringe) and the views of my informant (Tataba is Bughotu) support Whiteman and Simons' findings, so it is reasonable to conclude that the standard language map is incorrect. The revised map proposed here reduces the Gao speaking area to that indicated by Whiteman and Simons, and recognises the Maringe/Bughotu mix in the area around Tataba.

⁶ Much as I would like to recommend either Bla or Blabla as the language name.

⁷ In their language listings (1983:32-33) Tryon and Hackman follow Whiteman and Simons in treating Ghove as a dialect of Blablanga. This is clearly at odds with their own lexicostatistical comparisons which show it as having dialect level cognates with the other Maringe lists, not with the Blablanga list, and they in fact overtly mark it as having dialect status with these communalects. (1983:464)



Key to languages

- 1 Zabana
- 2 Zabana, formerly Laghu (now extinct)
- 3 Recent Maringe enclaves
- 4 Kokota
- 5a Blablanga (Popoheo/Hovukoilo dialect)
- 5b Blablanga (Kilokaka dialect)
- 5c Blablanga (Susubona dialect)
- 6 Maringe (aka Cheke Holo)
- 7 Mixed Maringe/Bughotu
- 8 Bughotu
- 9 Gao

Map 4: A tentative revised language map for Santa Isabel.
 (Note: the absence of dialect boundaries for languages other than Blablanga does not imply that no dialect differentiation exists.)