

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at:  
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284084627>

# The Papuan Languages of Timor, Alor and Pantar. Volume 1, written by Antoinette Schapper (ed.)

ARTICLE *in* BIJDRAGEN TOT DE TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE / JOURNAL  
OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AND  
OCEANIA · JANUARY 2015

Impact Factor: 0.24 · DOI: 10.1163/22134379-17104018

## 1 AUTHOR:



L. De Vries

VU University Amsterdam

59 PUBLICATIONS 71 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

### Antoinette Schapper (ed.)

*The Papuan Languages of Timor, Alor and Pantar. Volume 1.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014, viii + 509 pp. [Sketch Grammars. Pacific Linguistics 644]. ISBN 9781614517238. Price: EUR 99.95 (hardback).

Of the last ten years, the Papuan languages of Timor, Alor, and Pantar have finally received the attention they deserve. They form a family of around 30 languages, many of which were hardly documented until around 2000. The Timor-Alor-Pantar (TAP) language family is the western-most family of Papuan languages, spoken in south-eastern Indonesia and East Timor. The TAP languages are spoken in a very different sociolinguistic, cultural, historical, and ethnic setting than most of the Papuan languages in central mainland New Guinea, perhaps with the exception of the Bird's Head area, that resembles the TAP context in some ways, and where we also find Papuan languages with relatively simple morphologies, compared to the languages of New Guinea's central area. The TAP languages are surrounded by Austronesian languages, and TAP/Malay bilingualism is generally high.

The volume contains sketches of Wester Pantar (by Gary Holton), Kaera (Marian Klamer), Blagar (Hein Steinhauer), Adang (Laura Robinson & John Haan), Kamang (Antoinette Schapper), Sawila (František Kratochvíl) and Wersing (Antoinette Schapper & Rachel Hendery). The volume is well-edited, with a consistent format for the various articles, and has an excellent introduction by Antoinette Schapper, with an overview of the history of TAP linguistics that took off in the 1970s with the pioneering fieldwork of Wim Stokhof and Hein Steinhauer, and with a careful and nuanced take on the difficult issue of the genetic affiliation of the TAP family.

Calling the TAP languages morphologically simple is somewhat deceptive. As in many other Papuan languages spoken in mountainous terrain, TAP languages have elaborate coding of elevation deictics. But TAP languages easily beat most central New Guinea languages in elevational complexity: they distinguish three heights (above, below, and level, with respect to deictic center), enriched in some languages with sub distinctions of height related to distance (Abui), steepness of slope (Kamang, Western Pantar), and directionality with respect to the slope (traversing slope or following it) (Introduction, p. 15).

Another area of interest in TAP languages, focused on in almost all language sketches of this volume, are alignment systems, which show high diversity and typologically significant features. For example, Western Pantar, where S, A, or P may have an agreement prefix on the verb and speakers select prefixes to code levels of participant volition and affectedness (Introduction, p. 13). Finally, the TAP languages are a goldmine for typologists interested in serial verbs.

Many of the contributions in the volume are not based on extensive fieldwork or a significant degree of language learning by the linguists who wrote the sketches. Many data will have been obtained by 'hit-and-run' fieldwork trips, in which Indonesian was used to communicate with native speakers and where direct elicitation via Indonesian played a key role. Fortunately, all linguists contributing to this volume did their best to collect textual data as well.

Despite these limitations inherent to survey work that results in sketchy descriptions, this volume is an important contribution to Papuan linguistics, and a rich source of information on the western periphery of the Papuan linguistic world. Crucially, the volume gives a much-needed new balance to the overall study of Papuan languages.

*Lourens de Vries*

Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam

*[l.j.de.vries@vu.nl](mailto:l.j.de.vries@vu.nl)*