A Grammar of Neverver

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A Grammar of Neverver

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Julie Barbour
Hamilton, New Zealand
June 2012

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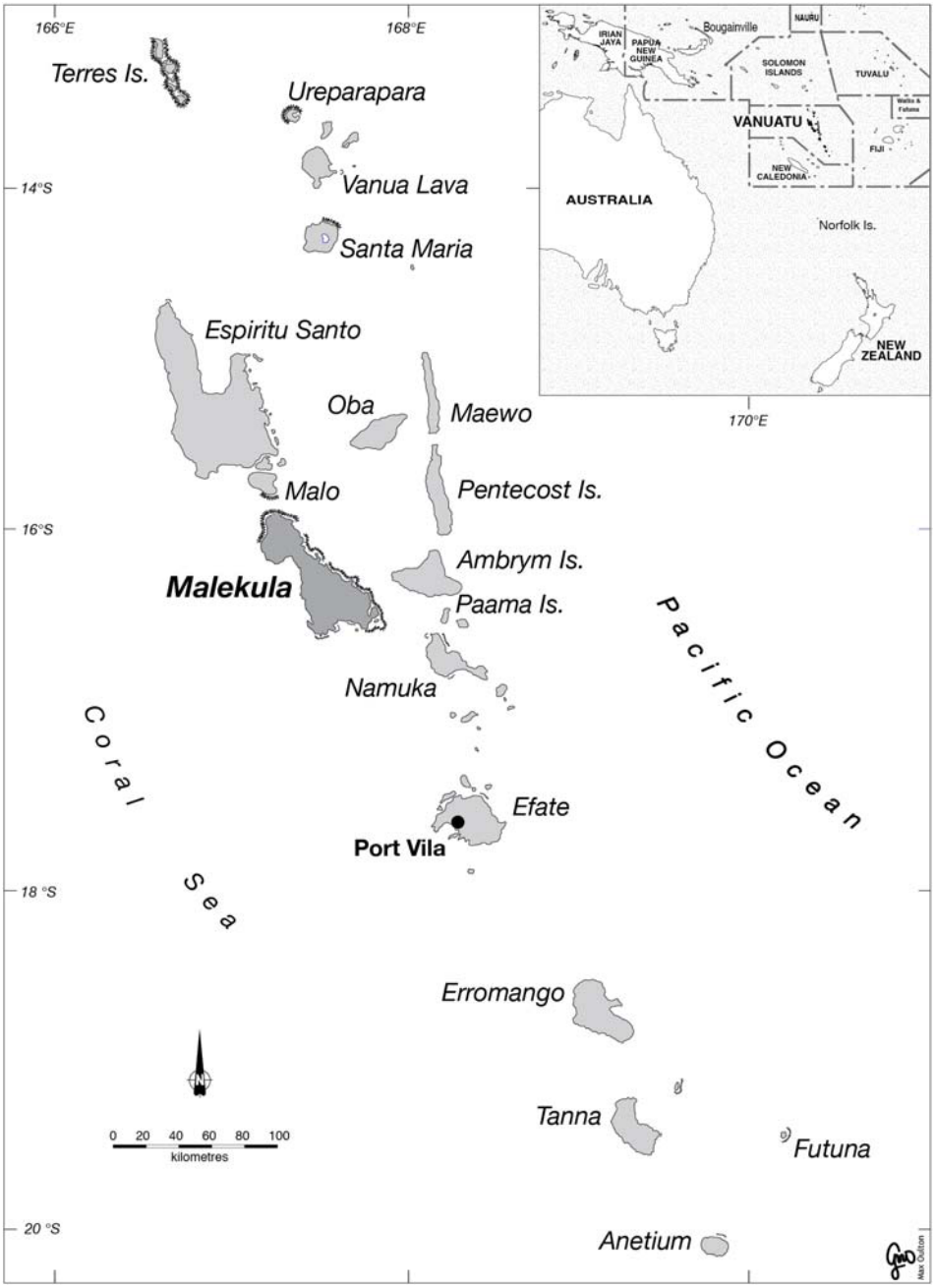
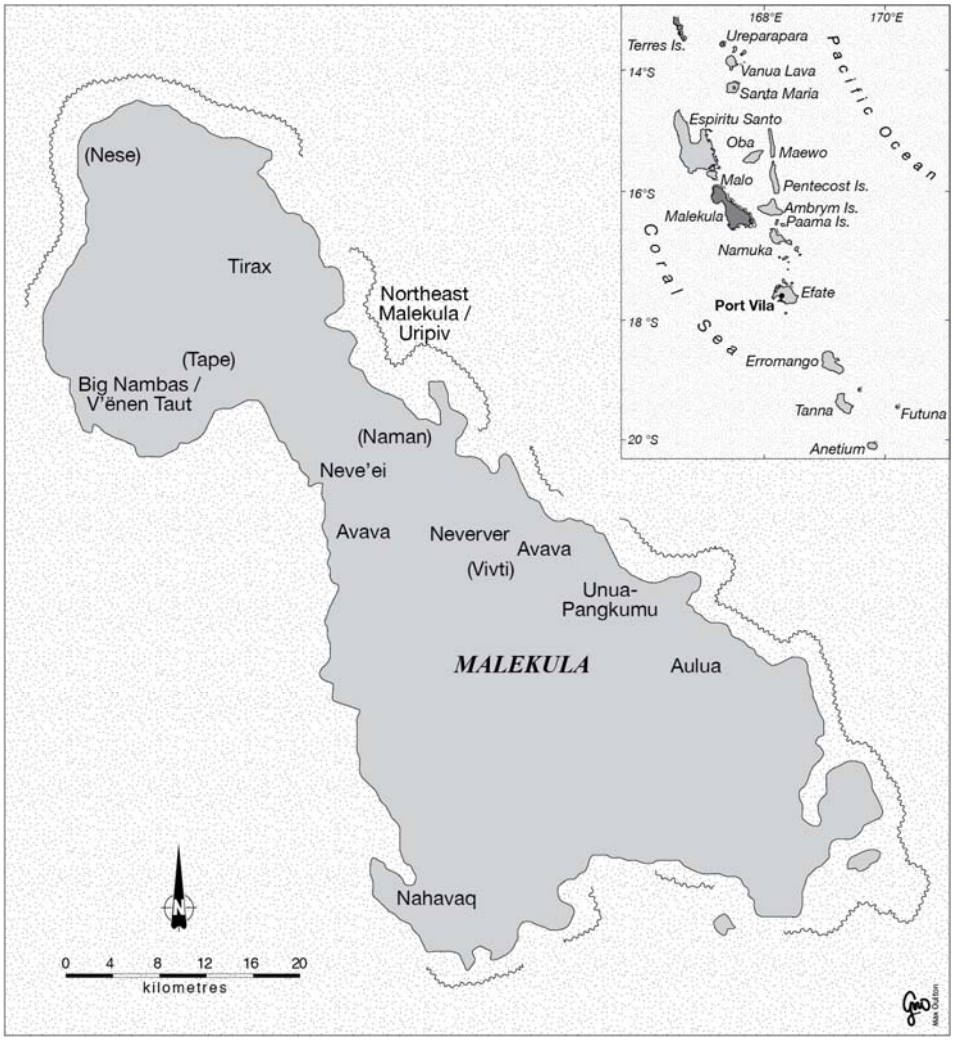
Abbreviations

,	pause
[NV...]	data reference
↗	rising intonation
→	level/falling intonation
↘	falling terminal intonation
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ANA	anaphoric demonstrative
ANT	anterior tense/aspect
APPL	applicative suffix
AUGCO	augmentative coordination
BENE	benefactive
CAUS	subordinator of cause
COMP	complementizer
COMPL	completive aspect
CONT	continuative aspect
COP	copula
DEF	definite
DEMSPN	demonstrative pronominal-noun
DU	dual
DUP	reduplication
EMPH	emphatic marker
EXCL	exclusive
EXCLAM	exclamatory marker
FREQ	frequentative aspect
IMM	immediate tense/aspect
IMPS	impersonal subject
INCL	inclusive
INDF	indefinite
INDF.PN	indefinite pronoun
IRR	irrealis mood
k.o.	a kind of
LOC	general locative preposition
LOC.ON	locative preposition ‘on’

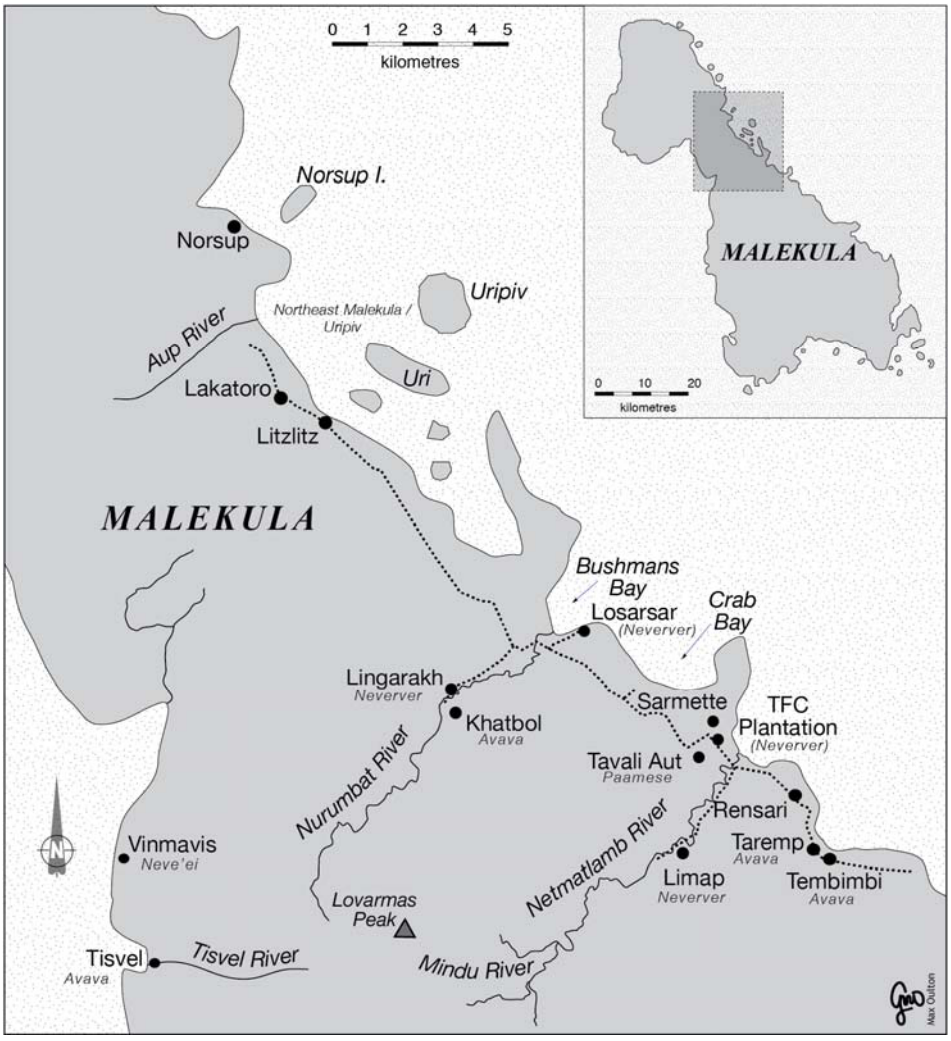
LOCPN	locative pronominal-noun
LOCPSN	locative personal preposition
n.	noun
NEG	negative particle
NMOD	nominal modifying particle
NPR	nominalizing prefix
NSF	nominalizing suffix
NSG	non-singular
PART	partitive aspect
PERF	discourse perfect aspect
PL	plural
PROG	progressive aspect
POSS	possessive
POSSDT	possessive determiner
PSNPR	personal prefix
POSSPN	possessive pronominalizer
PTLY	partly complete aspect
PURPOSE	subordinator of purpose
REAL	realis mood
RMT	remote tense/aspect
RSPN	resumptive pronoun
s.o.	someone
s.t.	something
SG	singular
ST	stative prefix
TEMP	temporary aspect
TEMPPROX	marker of temporal proximity
TMPPN	temporal pronominal-noun
v.	verb



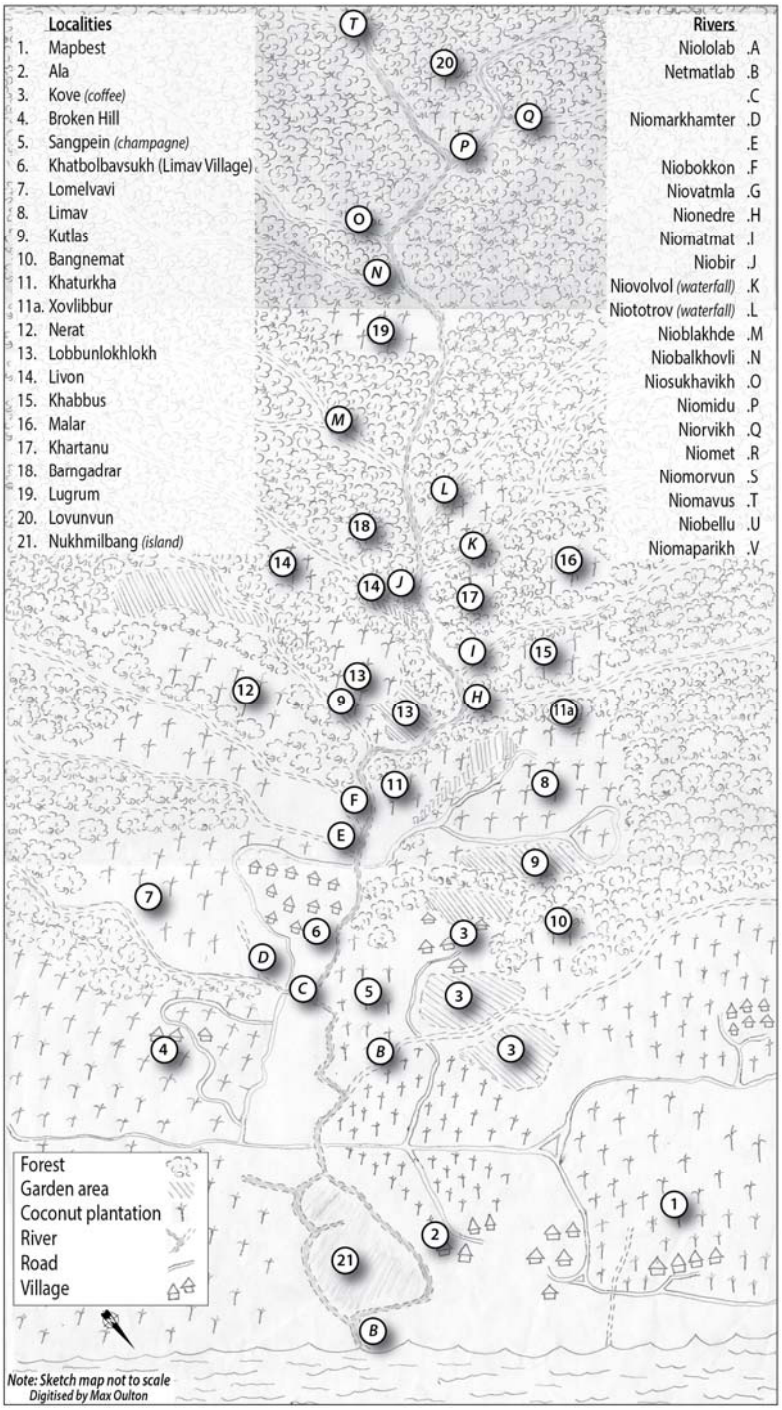
Map 1. Malekula Island in Vanuatu



Map 2. Location of Malekula languages that have been the subject of recent linguistic study. Moribund languages in parentheses.



Map 3. Location of Neverver speakers in North-Central Malekula. Non-dominant languages in parentheses.



Map 4. Hand-drawn map of the Netmatlab River Valley. Prepared by Song-Be Peniyas, with Limap village elders, for the Neverver Documentation Project.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Neverver, the language of the Mindu and Sakhan people, is spoken on Malekula Island in Vanuatu by some 560 people. The speech community is located primarily in the villages of Lingarakh and Limap on the eastern side of north-central Malekula. Neverver survives in a context of extraordinary linguistic diversity, being surrounded by indigenous Malekula languages as well as the introduced languages English, Bislama, and to a lesser extent French. Prior to the current study, this Southern Oceanic language (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002: 113–115) was virtually unknown to the academic world.

Despite the very small speech community and a range of pressures on the language, intergenerational transmission has continued and the language is not yet moribund. A language documentation project, initiated in August 2004, aims to provide a lasting record of Neverver as it is used by members of the speech community. Conducted in collaboration with a team of Neverver speakers, the language documentation project has already produced multiple outputs.[1] This descriptive grammar is one further output, targetted at a linguistic audience.

1.1. Geographic and linguistic context

Malekula Island, home to the speakers of the Neverver language, is the second largest of more than eighty islands that make up the Vanuatu archipelago. More than one hundred indigenous languages are thought to be spoken on the islands of Vanuatu, and at least eighty of these are still actively used (Lynch and Crowley 2001: 4). Malekula Island alone boasts some twenty-four actively-spoken indigenous languages, along with a further fifteen languages that have been

1. Major outputs of the documentation project comprise the development of a community orthography and literacy materials prepared in the orthography, including multiple copies of: an illustrated alphabet booklet; a numeral booklet; illustrated primers; flash cards; hymn booklets; and a collection of traditional and contemporary stories told by Neverver speakers. Most of the literacy materials have been prepared by community members. A draft wordlist has been compiled and is currently being developed into a dictionary. Visual images of community members collected during field work have been printed. Visual images of flora are being collated in a database with ethnobotanical documentation. A draft of this last output will be prepared in hard copy for community members to develop further.

identified as either extinct or moribund (Lynch and Crowley 2001: 68, 85). This extraordinary number of indigenous languages is spoken by a population of around 27,000, including residents both of the main island of Malekula, and those of the surrounding small islands (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2009: 13). The two largest languages are North East Malekula/Uripiv and Big Nambas/V'ënen Taut, with an estimated 12,000 speakers in total (Lynch and Crowley 2001: 68). The remaining twenty-two actively spoken languages boast very small populations.

According to local history, the Neverver speech community was traditionally located in the interior of Malekula, where it was spoken by the Mindu and Sakhan peoples. An account of traditional death ceremonies and beliefs features the central Lovarmas Peak as the point of departure of souls to *Labbu*, the spirit world (Lerakhsil Moti and James Bangsukh, pers. comm.). On a locally drawn map, the Mindu River is identified as an inland stream that feeds into the Netmatlamb River. The Netmatlamb River runs from inland Malekula past one of the present-day village sites, down to the eastern coast. Linguistic evidence supports local history, with a survey of the Neverver lexicon revealing none of the rich coral reef vocabulary typically used by coastal dwellers in the tropics.

Population movements towards the eastern coast are still recalled by older community members. Following the arrival of Christian missionaries on Malekula in the 1880s, the villagers report a gradual migration from the interior of Malekula towards Bushman's Bay and Crab Bay. The Mindu and Sakhan peoples settled together in Limap village in the Netmatlamb River Valley and in Lingarakh village in the Nurumbat River Valley. A few community members have moved further towards the eastern coast since that migration.

Malekula underwent severe depopulation in the early 1900s, primarily caused by the introduction of European diseases (cf. Crowley 1990: 98–100; Deacon 1934: 18–22). Traditional ways of life were interrupted by this depopulation and in the 1930s visiting anthropologist A. Bernard Deacon believed that the Malekulan people as a whole were unlikely to survive, commenting that 'the natives are the last survivors of a dying people' (Gardiner 1984: 33). Undoubtedly, the Neverver speech community was affected by depopulation also. The variety of Neverver spoken today is said to be based on the Mindu dialect. While some community members are still identified as being of Sakhan descent, any historical dialectal differences have been lost as the speakers have migrated and regrouped.

In early 2005, the total population of the Neverver speech community was calculated to be fewer than 600. This figure was based on a house-to-house head count that was carried out with language consultants in the community. When defined by Neverver speakers, the speech community consists of the members of all households where at least one parent speaks Neverver as their dominant language. Almost all such households are located in the villages of Limap or

Lingarakh, or in family hamlets surrounding these two villages. Lingarakh village is home to nearly 350 community members; Limap village is home to around 160 Neverver speakers. Around fifty more speakers live in coastal plantation settlements located up to three kilometres away from the main villages. Near the Limap access road is the locally-owned TFC[2] plantation and further north near the Lingarakh access road is the plantation settlement of Losarsar. Both plantation settlements are home to a small number of Neverver-speaking families. There are some non-community members in neighbouring villages who speak a little Neverver, but these people do not have direct family ties to the community and are not included by the community in their count of speakers. Even if such non-dominant speakers were to be included, it is unlikely that an estimated population would be significantly over 700 speakers.[3]

1.1.1. Limap village

Limap is the smaller of the two Neverver villages. It is geographically rather isolated. Foot roads into the deep interior that traditionally traversed the island have been abandoned and Limap can only be reached by a single access road from the eastern coast. A consequence of the isolation of Limap village is that villagers tend to be occupied with matters close to home. The cultivation of giant yams is the primary occupation of men, while women cultivate a wide range of tropical fruit and vegetables. Villagers also participate in the cultivation of coconuts and cacao trees, as harvesting copra and cacao is the main means of raising cash. Travel to other villages, including Lingarakh, is only undertaken for business or on special occasions.

Linguistically, Neverver is the dominant language of communication in Limap, with 88% of households reporting themselves to be Neverver-dominant. For families in which Neverver is not dominant, Bislama (a dialect of Melanesi-

2. The meaning of the acronym TFC could not be identified.
3. In *Languages of Vanuatu: A new survey and bibliography* (Lynch and Crowley 2001: 79), it was estimated that Nevwervwer (correctly Neverver) was spoken by approximately 1250 people. These speakers were thought to be distributed through the villages of Limap and Lingarakh, as well as Sarmet. Lynch and Crowley (2001: 4–6) stress that their figures are approximations and note that the actual figures could be considerably different (2001: 4–6). The estimated population was extrapolated from census data collected in 1989 and the assumption was made that a sizable number of people in surrounding villages are also competent Neverver speakers. Sarmet (or Sarmette) is in fact a plantation settlement rather than a local village, and is not the permanent home of any Neverver speakers. Unofficial figures from the 2009 census record 525 residents of Limap and Lingarakh villages (Harry Nalau, pers.comm.).

an Pidgin which is the national language of Vanuatu and regional *lingua franca* (Crowley 1990)) is the dominant language of communication between children and their parents. Outside of the home, Neverver is the most commonly heard language, although Bislama also occurs. Its use is triggered by the presence of non-community members, or by communication in domains where Bislama is employed rather than Neverver (see §1.3.2).

Many Limap residents, particularly members of the older generations, are multilingual. They speak up to three indigenous languages alongside Neverver and Bislama. There are two or three first-language speakers of the moribund Vivti language, and several Neverver speakers in the older generations can also speak some Vivti. In the village context, however, any individual multilingualism is rather inactive, as knowledge of other local languages is seldom required for day-to-day communication.

1.1.2. Lingarakh village

Lingarakh village, home to more than half of the Neverver speech community, is far less isolated than Limap. Lingarakh is located across the Nurumbat River from the Avava-speaking village of Khatbol. As Lingarakh and Khatbol have grown, the physical and social boundaries between the two villages have become indistinct. Additionally, community members regularly traverse the island to Vinmavis and Tisvel villages on the western coast. Daily transportation is available from Lingarakh into Lakatoro, the provincial centre of the Malampa (Malekula-Ambrym-Paama) province. 'Going to town' is undertaken for entertainment as well as business. There are employment opportunities in the government offices and businesses in Lakatoro for those with appropriate skills, and young men can find casual employment on coastal plantations between Lingarakh and Lakatoro. The traditional activity of gardening is now balanced with income-earning employment for Lingarakh residents.

While Neverver is still the dominant language of most people in Lingarakh, it is found in only 75% of households. Around 17% of households are Bislama-dominant and just over 8% of households make use of another local language as the dominant language of communication. In contrast to the reported, though largely inactive multilingualism in Limap village, the residents of Lingarakh village are more actively multilingual. Bislama is used regularly for a variety of daily interactions, alongside other vernacular languages and occasionally English. A consequence of the active multilingualism in Lingarakh is that some younger speakers of Neverver lack the wealth of lexical knowledge displayed by their peers in Limap.

1.1.3. Multilingual interactions

Malekula, with its large number of indigenous languages, has long been multilingual; however, the recent migration of people towards coastal settlements has brought Neverver speakers into daily contact with speakers of numerous other languages. Today, Neverver speakers interact with speakers of the related Avava language located in Khatbol, Taremp, Tembimbi, and Tisvel villages. There is regular contact with speakers of the Neve'ei language, in Vinmavis village. Neverver speakers also have contact with speakers of the Northeast Malekula/Uripiv language who live on the north-east coast of Malekula, as well as the remaining speakers of the moribund Naman, Vivti and Tape languages who are dispersed through north-central Malekula.

In addition to increasing contact with speakers of other indigenous languages, the movement of the Neverver speech community towards the eastern coast of Malekula has brought Neverver speakers into regular contact with Bislama and English, two dominant written languages. Bislama, Vanuatu's constitutionally recognized National Language (Vanuatu 1980), has been the *lingua franca* in the wider Malekula context for many generations now. All Neverver community members can speak this language and most have some literacy skills in Bislama. English and French were asserted as the languages of education and government in Vanuatu during the joint French-English colonial rule. Following Independence in 1980, English and French were named the languages of formal education in the Vanuatu constitution (Vanuatu 1980). English and French were also named the Official Languages of Vanuatu along with Bislama (Vanuatu 1980). Of these three languages, Bislama is the most widely spoken on Malekula. English and French remain prestigious because of their ties to education, administration and increasingly, financial success. Although there are Francophone areas in Malekula, the Neverver region is Anglophone and members of the Neverver speech community have not been observed to speak French.

1.2. Historical origins

Speakers of Neverver are hypothesized to be one of many groups of people who are descendants of the sea-faring travellers who made a style of ceramics known as 'Lapita'. The Lapita people are thought to be the single source of all early Oceanic settlement (cf. Kirch 2000). While archeological investigation in Vanuatu has been limited, it has supported the claim that the Lapita people were the initial settlers in the region, arriving around 3000 years ago (Kirch 2000: 135–138). Evidence from excavations on Malekula does not indicate any pre-Lapita settlement (cf. Bedford 2006: 259; Bedford et al. 1998: 185).

The current inhabitants of Malekula speak languages belonging to the Oceanic branch of the Austronesian language family (cf. Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002). It has been speculated that all the languages of Malekula may eventually be classified as part of the Oceanic subgroup named the 'Central Vanuatu Linkage', along with languages spoken on the islands of southern Pentecost, Ambrym, Epi, the Shepherd Islands, Nguna, and the northern parts of Efate (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002: 112–113).

Tryon's (1976) classification of the languages of Vanuatu (then the New Hebrides) is the earliest comprehensive attempt to explore the relationships between the vernacular languages of this region. This work was based largely on lexicostatistical principles, and is of rather limited reliability (see Lynch and Crowley (2001: 2–3) for a critique). Tryon includes the language of 'Lingarak' (after the village Lingarakh where Neverver is spoken today) in his survey. Using word lists to establish percentages of cognate forms, Tryon classifies Lingarak/Neverver as belonging to the Malekula Central Sub-group, along with Katbol/Avava, Vinmavis/Neve'ei, Litzlitz/Naman, Big Nambas/V'ënen Taut and a small number of other languages (Tryon 1976: 87–88). In 1976, when Tryon published his findings, none of these languages had been fully described.

Lynch (n.d.), working with data collected during new descriptive and documentary projects on Malekula,[4] proposes that Neverver's closest known genetic relative is the moribund Naman language. Lynch (n.d.) places Neverver and Naman in a sub-group of Malekula languages spoken on the western coast of the island. This placement appears at odds with the current location of the Neverver speech community on the eastern coast of Malekula but it aligns well with the oral history described in §1.1. that locates the speech community in the interior of the island. Although Lynch (n.d.) has begun to propose relationships between the languages spoken on Malekula, the detailed description of individual languages in this region needs to be completed before firmer sub-grouping hypotheses can be established.

4. A number of linguistic projects have been undertaken on Malekula Island in the last decade. The linguists working on these projects are mostly based in New Zealand, and include: Terry Crowley, who had described Avava (Crowley 2006a) and Naman (2006b), and had begun work on Nese (2006c), and Tape (2006d) before his death in 2005; Martin Paviour-Smith, who has been working with the Aulua community for nearly a decade; Elizabeth Pearce who has studied Unua-Pangkumu; Laura Dimock (2009) who has completed a description of Nahavaq; and Marie-France Duhamel, who is beginning a PhD on Atchin. Ross McKerras, formerly of SIL, has compiled a grammar sketch of Northeast Malekula/Uripiv, Amanda Brotchie (2009) of Melbourne University (Australia), has completed a study of Tirax, and Lana Takau of the University of Newcastle is beginning an extended description of Matanvat/Nese for her PhD. Kanauhea Wessels begins work on Malua Bay in late 2012 under my supervision.

1.2.1. Early work on Neverver

Before the current project began in August 2004, there had been very little research carried out on Neverver. The first published material on the language took the form of a short list of kinship terms under the name of Nesan in A. Bernard Deacon's anthropological volume titled *Malekula: A vanishing people in the New Hebrides* (Deacon 1934: 125). Bernard Deacon, a novice British anthropologist, spent around fourteen months on Malekula and its neighbouring islands in 1926 and early 1927, before his death from Blackwater fever on 12 March 1927 (Deacon 1934: xxvii). During this time, Deacon stayed with Ewan Corlette, a British planter who had a residence in Bushman's Bay. Bushman's Bay is no more than a day's walk from the Neverver villages, and it is possible that Deacon had contact with speakers of Neverver. The language name *Nesan* probably derives from the Neverver word *nessan* 'gut', which suggests the interior location of the speech community. On Deacon's hand-drawn maps, he identifies a group of people called the Mindu (Deacon 1934: 2). He locates these people in the south-west of Malekula rather than in north-central Malekula, but given that Deacon never spent time in inland central Malekula, the Mindu people on his map may well be the Neverver-speaking Mindu. He does not make the connection between Mindu and Nesan however.

Today, Deacon's field notes are stored in the Royal Anthropological Institute's manuscript collection in London, and in the Haddon Files at the Cambridge University Library archive. Among the field notes held in the Haddon Files, a word list of some one hundred and thirty lexical items from Nesan has been identified (Deacon 1926–1927).[5] This vocabulary list is clearly related to the Neverver language spoken today and even includes items with geminate consonants, which are a distinctive characteristic of Neverver (see §2.3.10). A number of interesting observations emerge from a comparison of Deacon's Nesan data and Neverver data collected in recent field trips. These are summarized in Table 1 below.

5. I came across Deacon's unpublished Nesan vocabulary list during a research trip to London in 2006. The aim of the research trip was to examine Deacon's field notes for data related to languages being investigated as part of a larger project titled 'Threatened languages on Malekula: Lessons for linguistic theory'. The complete vocabulary list is reproduced in Appendix I, with equivalents from the more recently collected Neverver material.

Table 1. Features of Neverver from data recorded by Deacon (1926–1927)

Observation	Deacon (1926–1927)	Barbour (2004–2008)
Evidence of geminate consonants	*mmap* ‘heavy’	[m:aɸ]
	-llag ‘seek’	[l:aŋ]
Evidence that the shift from [^{n}dʒ] to [^{n}s] was underway in the 1920s	*nituğans* ‘mosquito’	[nituɣa^{n}s]
Evidence of labio-velar consonants [^{m}b^{w}] and [p^{w}] that are no longer present	*nağambwir* (probably [naɣa^{m}b^{w}ir]) ‘dog’	[naɣa^{m}bir]
	pwis ‘smart’	[p:is] ‘hurt’
	nambwer ‘mushroom’	[ne^{m}ber ~ ne^{m}bendr]
No evidence of [^{d}] in the alveolar trill [ndr]	*nenre* ‘blood’	[nendre]
Evidence of front rounded vowels that are now very rare	*nivüs* (probably [niβys]) ‘bow’	[niβis]
	tölas (probably [tølas]) ‘undo’	[tlas] ‘untangle’

There can be no definitive explanation for the differences in the data collected by Deacon in the 1920s, and the data produced by native speakers of Neverver today. It is entirely likely that the language has undergone some phonemic change over the last century. Equally however, the data could have been provided by a speaker of some no-longer-spoken dialect (such as the Sakhan dialect) of Neverver, or by a fluent non-native speaker. Unfortunately, Deacon did not record any metadata with his word lists so we can do no more but speculate on his sources.

Much later, and without reference to Deacon’s linguistic records of Malekula languages, Darrell Tryon orchestrated a survey of the languages of Vanuatu. He identified Neverver as Bushman’s Bay (Tryon 1972), and then later as Lingarak (Tryon 1976). A Lingarak word list of around 180 items was published in Tryon's (1976) comparative study of the languages of the New Hebrides (described in §1.2 above). A list of tree names for the Bushman’s Bay language was later collected by S. Gowers, and these are scattered through a volume on common trees of Vanuatu (Wheatley 1992). The paucity of information about Neverver led to it being described as both undocumented and unwritten in Lynch and Crowley's (2001: 18) bibliographic survey of the languages of Vanuatu.

1.3. An evaluation of language vitality[6]

In 2004, when the current project began, very few specific details were known about the Neverver language or its speakers. The current project has shed light on both topics. In this chapter, sociolinguistic matters are considered; linguistic matters are dealt with in chapters two to thirteen.

Prior to the current investigation, the vitality of Neverver had not been considered. It became a matter of interest when interacting with the speech community. In evaluating the vitality of the Neverver language, I employ the Language Vitality Assessment framework proposed by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages (2003). In their article *Language Vitality and Endangerment* (UNESCO 2003), the Expert Group propose a set of nine factors for evaluating the vitality of an individual language. These factors are intended to be used as a tool for identifying the most urgent needs of a language community. The nine factors of the language vitality assessment include factors relating to the basic vitality of the language, the domains in which it is used, the current levels of linguistic documentation and literacy, and attitudes towards the language (UNESCO 2003: 7). A summary of the language vitality assessment for the Neverver speech community is presented here. The complete evaluation can be found in Appendix II.[7]

1.3.1. Language statistics and transmission patterns

In the language vitality assessment (UNESCO 2003), factors one to three deal with the numbers of people who speak the language and its transmission patterns. As noted in §1.1 above, the total population of the Neverver speech community is less than six hundred. This figure includes the members of all households where at least one parent speaks Neverver as their dominant language.

---

6. The material presented in sections 1.3 and 1.4 is used by permission of Oxford University Press, appearing previously in:
   Barbour, J. 2010. Neverver: A study of language vitality and community initiatives. In Margaret Florey (Ed.). *Endangered Languages of Austronesia*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 225-244.
7. Statements made about the vitality of the Neverver language are based almost entirely on my own 'outsider's' observations of the speech community, although comments made to me by community members have shaped my interpretation of the context.

The language is being transmitted to children in almost all households, although there are a small number of households with young children where Bislama, or another local language, is the dominant tongue. Thus, while the absolute number of speakers is extremely small, transmission is still taking place in most households.

1.3.2. Domains of use

Factors four and five of the UNESCO (2003) language vitality assessment concern domains of language use. The vitality of a language can be evaluated not only in terms of the number of domains in which it is used, but also in its capacity to make the transition into new domains. In the Neverver speech community, the domains in which Neverver is spoken have decreased. Traditional cultural practices have gradually succumbed to Western cultural practices. New communicative domains have emerged in both Limap and Lingarakh, but there have been few attempts to expand Neverver into these domains. Speech events concerning the church and public ceremonies, as well as regional politics and education, take place in Bislama or English rather than Neverver. Neverver is thus excluded from a number of domains that have become central to contemporary life.

1.3.2.1. Religion

In the domain of religion, Presbyterian beliefs and practices are now the centre of community life. Superficially, church events and the church hierarchy appear to have replaced many traditional events and social structures; however, the reality is that traditional beliefs and practices correspond well with Presbyterianism. There is evidence of local interpretations in the practice of Presbyterianism and at the same time, traditional practices have been incorporated into the contemporary religious system. For example, many traditional rituals associated with gardening have been absorbed into church rituals. Linguistically, however, religion is a domain dominated by Bislama. There are no religious materials in Neverver as yet. Hymn books are printed in Bislama, and personal Bibles are available either in Bislama or English. Services are conducted in Bislama, with occasional Bible readings in English. Neverver is used for a small number of hymns that community members have learnt, but it is not used for prayer or teachings. Rather, people use Neverver for more secular matters such as community notices at the end of the church service, for the children's story told during the service, for gossip, and for disciplining children.

1.3.2.2. Education

In the domain of education, community members report a traditional process whereby boys and girls were initiated separately into the roles and responsibilities of society. This has been replaced by English-medium formal education. There is no formal instruction either in the medium of Neverver or with Neverver as a subject. Neverver is used for basic organizational purposes in the local kindergartens, but even at the pre-school age, there is an emphasis on teaching English to prepare children for primary school. This is carried out mostly through the medium of Bislama rather than Neverver. In Lingarakh, Bislama is used by necessity in the kindergarten as there are a number of children in the village who do not speak Neverver. Formal education is offered in English at the area primary school in Lingarakh and also at Rensari primary school to the south of Limap. French-medium education is also available at Rensari, but very few Neverver-speaking children are admitted to the French-medium programme. This appears to be because of the Anglophone orientation of the region where Neverver is spoken. Both Rensari and Lingarakh primary schools are staffed by teachers from different parts of Vanuatu and the teachers interact in English and Bislama. The schools cater for children from the linguistically diverse villages of central Malekula. The children board with local families during the week, and they generally interact in Bislama with their host-families and with each other. The communication pattern of using Bislama in any multilingual context is well-established at this age in the linguistically heterogeneous primary schools.

1.3.2.3. Media

In the domain of media, with respect to radio, newspapers and television, there are no Neverver-based new media available at present. English, French and Bislama are the languages of these new media in Vanuatu, but these are accessed rather rarely in the villages of Malekula with lack of electricity and poor transmission being significant barriers. Newspapers can be purchased in Lakatoro, but few families read newspapers regularly. Television has not reached the villages as yet, though DVDs and videos are played during special events and workshops. Bislama-medium educational films are extremely popular, as are English-language movies. In the future, it is likely that access to media technology will continue to increase, even in the more remote villages of Malekula. Given the cost of producing television, radio, and newspaper materials, the domain of new media is more likely to be dominated by English, French or even Bislama than in any of the indigenous languages of Vanuatu. At present, new media are less important in the Neverver-speaking region than the traditional oral networks used for distributing information. These oral networks function

effectively in Neverver, in other local languages, and in Bislama, depending on who is passing on information to whom. Education and religion are another matter, as Neverver is marginalized in these domains.

1.3.3. Language support

Factors seven and eight of the language vitality assessment (UNESCO 2003) consider support for the language at both local and national levels. Positive attitudes towards endangered languages can signal an interest in and support for language maintenance activities. While local support is weakly articulated but clearly present, national support is enshrined in the constitution, but more difficult to see in practice.

1.3.3.1. Local support

Concerning local support for Neverver, it was my observation that a conscious awareness of language endangerment was present among older community members and community leaders. The awareness of potential language loss was more strongly articulated in Limap village than in Lingarakh. The following statements were made on numerous occasions in Bislama during the fieldwork periods:

- *Young people say this (...) wrongly; they should say it like this (...).*
- *People in Lingarakh don't speak as well as we do here in Limap.*
- *People today don't understand the deeper meanings of words; their understanding is like the leaves on trees rather than the tree trunk itself.*

These comments show an awareness that Neverver is undergoing change and is perhaps weakening. In terms of language attitudes, the comments indicate that people consider contemporary changes to be undesirable. A further comment was made to me on many occasions in the context of discussions about my role as a language documenter and collector of rarely used vocabulary items:

- *It is good that you've come to write down our language, Julie. Now you can teach it back to us.*

While over-estimating my role in language revival, this comment signals that community members believe their linguistic knowledge has gaps and that it would be good to do something about these gaps.

Although community members did express concern about language change and erosion, not many expressed the belief that Neverver is in any danger. In

general, when language was discussed, attitudes were expressed with respect to the role of various languages in the formal education system. Strong local support was expressed for the continued use of English in the education system. Bislama was regarded as an essential means of communication within the wider Malekula region and Vanuatu in general, although many people expressed the view that it was not a suitable language for education. The use of Neverver in kindergartens was generally thought to be a good idea, although not at the expense of preparing children for their English-medium primary education. Because intergeneration transmission is continuing, it is difficult for Neverver speakers to see that there is any immediate threat to the language.

1.3.3.2. Official support

In terms of official support for vernacular languages, the constitution of Vanuatu offers protection for local languages, but it is English, French and Bislama that are declared the official languages of the country and English and French that are declared the languages of education (Vanuatu 1980: 3(1)–(2)). Official protection for indigenous languages has meant that the Vanuatu National Cultural Council and the Vanuatu Immigration Service support foreign researchers, particularly those invited by local communities, in the provision of research permits and visas. Attempts are currently underway at a national level to provide more comprehensive support for indigenous languages. In November 2005, the draft *Vanuatu National Language Policy* was presented for public comment (Vanuatu National Language Council 2005). This policy is explicit in its support for the indigenous languages of Vanuatu, as Article 5.4 reveals:

> 5.4 The Local or Indigenous Languages
>
> With over 100 different indigenous languages, Vanuatu is linguistically very diverse. These languages are vital expressions of Vanuatu's social and cultural identity, expressing the intimate relationship of ni-Vanuatu to their land and traditions. There is an urgent need to preserve, and where appropriate revitalise, some of these languages that are on the verge of extinction. Viable indigenous languages – those languages which a significant number of children continue to acquire as their first language – should be promoted for the use of future generations. Vanuatu has an obligation to use, document, promote and protect our indigenous languages. (Vanuatu National Language Council 2005: 4)

Since Vanuatu gained independence in 1980, there has been discussion of the introduction of indigenous languages into the lower levels of schooling in Vanuatu (cf. Crowley and Lynch 1986; Regenvanu 2004). This matter is explicitly addressed in the National Language Policy in Article 5.4.1, where it is stated that "as much as possible, indigenous languages are to be used as the language of instruction in early childhood learning up to primary level". There is a

more generally expressed desire to see vernacular literacy develop, with Article 5.4.3 stating that "indigenous language are to be promoted for use in adult and childhood literacy acquisition programs" (Vanuatu National Language Council 2005: 4).

The Vanuatu National Curriculum Unit has recently launched its first curriculum statement (Ministry of Education Vanuatu 2010). This statement makes explicit reference to the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and indigenous languages in the formal curriculum. The curriculum statement is an important step towards the implementation of vernacular education in Vanuatu as it serves as a government endorsement of the use of indigenous languages in the formal education system.

1.3.4. Literacy development and language documentation

Factors six and nine of the language vitality assessment (UNESCO 2003) measure the availability of resources for literacy projects, and the type and quality of documentation that exists. Neverver scores rather poorly in relation to these factors. Neverver was thought by the linguistic world to be an unwritten language. In fact, a large number of hymns have been translated into Neverver by an elderly community member. At the beginning of the current project, however, this material had not been distributed through the community and literacy skills were limited to just this one community member.

Prior to 2004, only brief word lists in Neverver had been published. Now that the documentation project is drawing to a close, the type and quality of documentation for Neverver is improving rapidly; however, much of the data collected so far has not yet been distributed among community members. The body of the materials that form the documentation corpus is held in digital form at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. Access for community members to this digital material is not yet possible, although hard copies of some texts and lexical material have been returned to the community and more materials are in preparation.

The language vitality assessment presents a picture of Neverver as a language with a small and rather vulnerable speech community that is beginning to show signs of language shift. This is particularly the case in Lingarakh village, where languages other than Neverver are making inroads into the home domain. Intergenerational transmission is likely to be interrupted in affected households, as the next generation of children grow up more confident in languages other than Neverver. Neverver has not yet transitioned into any new domains. Education, religion, and financial success are all seen as prestigious and are all associated with literacy skills in English and/or Bislama. These domains, and the skills associated with them, are likely to continue to grow in importance. As this

happens, the traditional domains in which Neverver still plays a central role may become less relevant. The larger Neverver community does not appear to be terribly concerned about the vitality of the language. While there is a general awareness that the language is in some way being eroded, this awareness has not yet translated into an articulated desire for *language maintenance*.

1.4. Emerging vernacular literacy practices

Literacy has a rather marginal role in daily life of many villagers living on Malekula. Paviour-Smith (2008: 11) observes of the Aulua community in central Malekula, that "proficiency in writing and knowledge of various genres is distributed unevenly across the population, [and] writing to get things done requires the pooling of literacy (and the associated material) resources". The same comment is true of Neverver. The literacy skills that are present in the Neverver speech community are practised in Bislama and English, and are confined to religious and commercial matters among adults and to educational matters among children. Added to the uneven distribution of literacy skills in the community is an uneven distribution of knowledge of the vernacular, with some older community members in particular displaying a much broader, and at the same time more detailed lexical knowledge compared to the language knowledge of younger speakers. As noted above, younger speakers in Limap tend to display a greater depth of Neverver knowledge than those in the more linguistically diverse Lingarakh village.

Despite the limited role of literacy in village life, vernacular literacy is seen as desirable. Locally motivated vernacular literacy practices are beginning to emerge in the domains of religion and early childhood education in the Neverver speech community.

1.4.1. Literacy in religion

In the domain of religion, one community member has worked extensively on developing an orthographic system for Neverver, for the purpose of translating hymns from English and Bislama into Neverver. Over a period of 25 years, Chief Jacob Naus has developed an orthographic system for Neverver and translated more than 300 hymns from English and Bislama. His goal was to introduce vernacular literacy to the wider community so that community members could sing hymns in Neverver. Chief Jacob's work eventually stalled as his writing system did not gain currency with the community. Only those hymns that were taught orally were successfully learned by community members.

Chief Jacob faced many linguistic and personal problems while working alone; he has been able to address these problems through me, in my role as visiting linguist. In consultation with community members, I have developed a draft orthography for use in the larger language documentation project. This orthography has been used to produce a standardized version of Chief Jacob's hymns. Hymn booklets have now been distributed among community members.

Because of the significance of religion to contemporary community life, and the enthusiasm for singing as entertainment, the hymn booklets have proven very popular.[8] Both the Limap and Lingarakh communities have instituted weekly singing sessions to learn new songs. These weekly sessions have followed a community-led literacy workshop for youth, where the written form of the language was introduced. Community members report positive feedback both from speakers of Neverver, and from speakers of other local languages whenever Neverver songs are sung at multilingual events.

There is also a growing interest in the activity of Bible translation. The launch of the *Uripiv New Testament* on Uripiv Island in late 2005 attracted attention throughout Malekula. In Lingarakh and Limap, interest in Bible translation is most commonly expressed by community leaders who hold positions within the church hierarchy. Despite their interest, they have not initiated Bible translation yet. One reason for this is that the current community leaders are aware that their knowledge of Neverver is not as extensive as the knowledge of their parents' generation. Older community members, now in their 60s and 70s, can display considerable differences in their lexical knowledge with gaps in some areas and a wealth of knowledge in others. On one occasion, during my second field trip, a church elder in Limap brought me a carefully preserved copy of Pastor Bill Camden's (1977) Bislama-English dictionary. He leafed through the text with me, saying that a Neverver dictionary would be highly valued by the community. The idea of a single source of lexical information, represented in a dictionary, is immediately appealing to those considering translation work. Such a document has the obvious advantage of outliving its contributors. Not only that, it can offer a standardized set of spellings, and a record of the attested usages of words.

8. Paviour-Smith (2008: 5–7; 16–17) provides a comparable description of the role of the Church in the Aulua community of central Malekula, and a justification for the introduction and support of vernacular literacy in this domain.

1.4.2. Literacy in entertainment

As a language with a very short history of writing, narratives in Neverver belong to an oral tradition. Few people read for entertainment, and what reading does take place is most often for religious purposes. In the oral tradition, however, stories that describe the origins of Neverver cultural practices and that capture historical events stand alongside contemporary 'made up' stories as well as translations of Bible stories and secular material. Stories play an important role in the speech community. They are used for the dual purposes of entertainment and education and are told during Sunday school, in the story segment of the formal church service, and during kindergarten classes, as well as in private family gatherings.

Given the lack of vernacular literacy skills in the community, it is not surprising that community members had not attempted to make permanent records of their stories. Today however, story-tellers are keen to be recorded 'performing' their stories and are interested in seeing their stories printed in booklets. Language consultants working with me on the documentation project took on the task of editing a number of stories that I had recorded and they are now working on translations into Bislama. The language consultants lack resources to reproduce the stories on paper within their speech community; with external support however, they are developing reading materials targetted at older and younger audiences for entertainment and pedagogic purposes.

1.4.3. Literacy in education

Vernacular literacy is beginning to emerge in pre-school education. Both Limap and Lingarakh villages have locally-run kindergartens. These are ostensibly vernacular kindergartens, established in order to introduce children to formal education through the medium of their indigenous language. The establishment of the kindergartens is in line with the Vanuatu government's ten-year Education Master Plan (Republic of Vanuatu 1999), whereby the kindergartens are to be established and maintained by the local community with little or no government support. Until recently, the kindergartens have focussed on introducing the children to basic English, through the medium of Bislama. As part of the language documentation project, two community members made the journey from Limap village in Malekula to Hamilton in New Zealand to work with me at the University of Waikato. The two young women who came have both been involved with the Limap kindergarten and they also participated as language consultants on the documentation project during my field trips. Over a five week period, we completed the editing and translation of a set of stories and further developed the Neverver-English word list, which will eventually be a Neverver-

Bislama-English dictionary. In addition, the women spent time developing a range of literacy resources for use in the Limap and Lingarakh kindergartens including a Neverver alphabet booklet, a counting booklet, large-print stories with pictures, and laminated flash cards to familiarize children with the written form of the language. The women have taken multiple copies of these resources back to the villages.

1.5. Documenting Neverver

The current work is one output of a larger documentation project on the Neverver language.[9] This particular output is aimed at a linguistic readership rather than a community readership, and it stands alongside other outputs that have a community focus including images, sound recordings, Chief Jacob's hymn collection (§1.4.1), and literacy materials for children and adults (§1.4.2–§1.4.3).

Linguistic fieldwork has traditionally been conducted with the aim of investigating an unknown language, preferably in some remote locale, and producing a description of the structural systems of that language. Himmelmann (n.d.: 9) summarizes the aims of describing a language as follows: "a language description aims at the record of a language, with 'language' being understood as a system of abstract elements, constructions and rules which constitute the invariant underlying structure of the utterances observable in a speech community". The methodology associated with language description often involves researcher-led interviews, where a speaker of the language provides information about his/her language as the researcher requests. Publications on field methodology contain lists of items and structures that might be used as a guide for the researcher (cf. Bouquiaux and Thomas 1992; Vaux and Cooper 1999). Descriptive work may also involve the analysis of existing text materials such as religious works. Equally, it can involve the analysis of newly collected text materials from members of the speech community. Such a methodology is assumed rather than made explicit in descriptive grammars, and any community-oriented activities that a descriptive linguist might engage in tend to be unacknowledged. The aims of language documentation are rather different from those of traditional language description, although for many linguists, the activities overlap considerably in practice.

9. In his seminal article "Documentary and descriptive linguistics", Nikolaus Himmelmann (1998) proposes that field linguists engage in "language documentation" rather than simply data collection for descriptive ends. Quotations and figures from an expanded version of "Documentary and descriptive linguistics" (Himmelmann n.d.) are presented in this work.

In a language documentation, there is an explicit acknowledgement of collaboration with a given speech community. Community-oriented outputs that result from collaboration are considered just as important as the obligatory descriptive grammar. Himmelmann (n.d.) defines the aims of language documentation as follows:

> The aim of a language documentation then, is to provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community. Linguistic practices and traditions are manifest in two ways: 1) the observable *linguistic behavior,* manifest in everyday interaction between members of the speech community, and 2) the native speakers' *metalinguistic knowledge,* manifest in their ability to provide interpretations and systematics for linguistic units and events. (Himmelmann n.d.: 9)

In documenting a language, a linguist makes linguistic behaviour the heart of the project and the collection of this linguistic behaviour is the central focus of the field experience. Descriptive generalizations will likely arise from the data collected in a language documentation, but it is conceivable that any number of other outputs might also eventuate, including pedagogic materials, ethnographic statements, image collections, documentary-type films, sociolinguistic commentary and enhanced typological understandings.

The overt acknowledgement of the centrality of the speech community in linguistic field research has been motivated in part by the increasing awareness of the need to conduct research in an ethical manner. The idea that fieldwork should be more than simply 'on' a language (Cameron et al. 1992: 22–24) has increasingly gained strength. Grinevald (2003) advocates fieldwork that is carried out on a language, for the language community, with speakers of the language community, and where and whenever possible, by community members themselves. In this view, a field linguist would "combine doing fieldwork with teaching, training, and mentoring native speakers for sustainable documentation projects" (Grinevald 2003: 60).

Dwyer (2006) proposes five core ethical principles to guide language documentation. Although the Neverver documentation project predates the publication of these principles, they accurately reflect the ethical spirit of the current project.

- Principle 1: Do no harm (including unintentional harm)
- Principle 2: Reciprocity and equity
- Principle 3: Do some good (for the community as well as for science)
- Principle 4: Obtain informed consent before initiating research
- Principle 5: Archive and disseminate your data and results
  (Dwyer 2006: 38–40)

The shift of linguistic field work from research 'on' to research 'for', 'by' and 'with', requires new approaches to data collection, manipulation and analysis. In collaboration with the speech community, the field linguist now needs to develop a large corpus of linguistic behaviour. Woodbury (2003) encourages linguists to develop a documentation corpus that is diverse, large, ongoing, transparent, preservable, and portable, as well as being ethical. The characteristics of diversity, size and duration are of immediate concern to the field linguist as the definition of these terms will impact on the field research goals of the linguist.

Himmelmann (n.d.) offers some very general suggestions about the composition of a documentation corpus, identifying communicative events, lists, and analytic matters as being basic linguistic elements of a language documentation.

General Information	Documents of Linguistic Behavior and Knowledge		
Speech Community Language Fieldwork Methods	Communicative Events (with translation and commentary)	Lists (paradigms, folk taxonomies)	Analytic Matters

Figure 1. Basic format of a language documentation (reproduced from Himmelmann n.d.: 13)

Himmelmann's analytic matters in Figure 1 above align closely with the traditional activity of carrying out field research with the aim of describing a language. Lists relate to the development of phonological descriptions. They also relate to dictionary development, although this task has traditionally been seen as distinct from grammatical description. The collection of communicative events is at the core of language documentation but a rather unacknowledged aspect of traditional grammatical description.

In documenting Neverver, a wide range of materials have contributed to the documentation corpus. The full digital corpus is tabulated in Appendix III; below are the main categories of materials.

Table 2. Summary of the Neverver documentation corpus

Communicative Events (sound recordings with transcribed and annotated text files)	Traditional stories Contemporary stories Descriptions of traditional cultural practices Descriptions of activities in modern daily life Conversations Traditional and contemporary songs
Lists	Lexical items Inflected verbs with example sentences
Analytic matters	Sets of elicited constructions arranged by structure or function
General Information	Survey of language practices Digital images including indigenous flora, cultural events, members of the speech community

1.5.1. Working with the Neverver speech community

The current project was initiated by the Neverver community members. After years of working on an orthography that failed to gain currency with the speech community, Chief Jacob Naus sent out a request for a linguist to visit the community and provide support. The request reached the late Professor Terry Crowley, who regularly visited Malekula Island to visit friends and conduct his own research. Crowley, knowing of my interest in linguistic field research, proposed that I work with the Neverver speech community. In preparation for the project, Crowley found me a Bislama tutor and in the months prior to beginning the project, I acquired a working level of Bislama which would subsequently prove indispensable in the field.

In early August 2004, having secured a graduate studentship from the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Documentation Project, ethical approval from the University of Waikato (my host institution), and approval from the Vanuatu National Cultural Council, I departed for Malekula Island for the first of two periods of field work. Altogether, I spent nearly nine months in Lingarakh and Limap villages. In addition to this, I arranged a five-week workshop in the summer of 2008 at my university. Two language consultants made the journey to New Zealand, to work on the documentation project, and experience life here.

Table 3. Field research with the Neverver speech community

Time frame	Activity	Primary Location
August 04–January 05	Field trip	Lingarakh village, Malekula
September 05–November 05	Field trip	Limap village, Malekula
January 08–February 08	Collaborative workshop	Hamilton, New Zealand

In the field, I worked with a large group of people. This was partly because of the different strengths that individuals were able to bring to the project. Equally important however, was the fact than any contributions that people made to the project took them away from their other duties and responsibilities in the community. The key language consultants and their most significant contributions to the language documentation are recorded below. Many other people contributed to the corpus of recorded texts, to the lexical database, and to the task of hosting a foreign researcher.

Chief Jacob Naus of Lingarakh village developed the Neverver hymn collection and contributed to story telling, lexicography, ethno-botanical documentation, and cultural documentation. Chief Jacob made the initial request for a linguist to come and work with the Neverver community. Chief James Bangsukh of Limap village shared traditional stories and information on traditional cultural practices. He also contributed to lexicography, and ethno-botanical documentation, and was a key consultant on analytic matters. His wife Lydia is one of the last surviving speakers of the Vivti language. Lerakhsil Moti, resident of TFC plantation, and regular visitor to Lingarakh and Limap, is the oldest speaker of Neverver at over eighty years. Lerakhsil shared many traditional stories and also contributed to lexicography and cultural documentation. She was a key contributor to ethno-botanical documentation. She and her ailing husband Moti have an extraordinary knowledge of indigenous plants and their traditional uses.

Emma, Nellie, and Peter Vatdal of Lingarakh village assisted with the rather arduous task of transcribing and translating recorded texts while I was a novice in the field. Helen-Rose Peniyas, Emlina Simo, Limei Simo, and John-Jilik formed a team who worked in rotation with me in Limap village in the 2005 field trip, assisting with the transcription and interpretation of recorded texts and contributing to the corpus of contemporary stories and conversations. They also assisted with the expansion of the Neverver lexicon. We spent many hours working through the Neverver word list, and they provided positive and negative evidence for all manner of syntactic constructions. Cousins Helen-Rose and Emlina made the journey to New Zealand in 2008 to work on the documentation project. Helen-Rose is the current kindergarten teacher in Limap village; Emlina assisted her older sister Limei in the kindergarten prior to Helen-Rose's appointment.

My host family in Lingarakh were Douglas Vatdal and his wife Lewia from the Avava-speaking Khatbol village. They provided a safe and comfortable environment in their beautiful home near Khatbol village during my first extended field trip. My host family in Limap were Peniyas Bong and his wife Lina. They were keen participants in the second shorter field trip. Despite their many personal and community obligations, Peniyas and Lina actively facilitated the documentation project by arranging language consultants and guiding the contributions that I made to the community. Lina was very supportive of my language-learning efforts and is a natural lexicographer.

1.5.2. Describing Neverver

The current work is a descriptive grammar of the Neverver language based on data collected in the field, including approximately twenty hours of recorded communicative events. As far as possible, I have based the analysis on material extracted from the corpus of communicative events, using elicited material only sparingly to fill in gaps. In the analysis, I employ linguistic terminology that is in general use by Oceanic linguists. In places I make reference to the developing literature of linguistic typology where this is useful to frame and support my analysis of Neverver. Work on mood-prominent languages (Bhat 1999, Elliot 2000, Palmer 2001) and verb serialization (Aikhenvald and Dixon 2006; Alsina, Bresnan and Sells 1997; Crowley 2002a) has permitted a rather more thorough treatment of these topics than would have been possible previously.

The following analysis represents the understanding that I have reached of the way that Neverver is typically used by its speakers, in the range of spoken contexts to which I had access. Reflecting both my interests and my limitations as a researcher, it purports to be neither a definitive nor a complete account of the language. It is however, a beginning, and in the words of a seasoned Neverver story teller:

(1) *Ni-tbbukh* *no-ssor-ian* *lele* *i-skham*
1REAL:SG-have NPR-speak-NSF small 3REAL:SG-one
il *nim-sisir.*
PURPOSE 1IRR:SG-discuss
No-ssor-ian *lele* *ang* *i-gang.*
NPR-speak-NSF small ANA 3REAL:SG-like.so
'I have a short story to tell. The short story goes like so...'
[NVCT06.02-03: 9.797-13.437]

Chapter 2
Phonology

2.0. Introduction

Neverver has nineteen consonant segments and a basic five-vowel inventory, with another two vowels attested in a small number of lexical items. Allophonic variation primarily involves the de-voicing of word-final consonants. Descriptions of the consonants and vowels are presented in §2.1. to §2.4. The language permits sequences of consonants, both geminate and heterogeneous. Vowels can also form heterogeneous sequences. Constraints on syllable structure, described in §2.5., play a central role in the form of attested lexical items as well as in prefixation processes discussed in subsequent chapters. A small number of phonological processes, outlined in §2.6., apply in the language. The most important processes are neutralization and epenthesis. Stress (§2.7.) is not contrastive and has a rather minor role in the articulation of words, while intonation patterns (§2.8.) are far more important, and enable speakers to distinguish between certain types of constructions. The phonemic contrasts identified in Neverver are represented in a draft community orthography, presented in §2.9.

2.1. The consonant inventory

Table 4. The Neverver consonant inventory

		bilabial	alveolar	palatal	velar	labio-velar
Nasals		m	n		ŋ	
Plosives	Plain	p	t		k	
	Prenasalized	b	d		g	
Fricatives	Plain	β	s		ɣ	
Affricates	Prenasalized			ʤ		
Trills	Plain		r			
	Prenasalized	ʙ	ᴅ			
Approximants			l	j		w

Neverver has nineteen consonant segments. Prenasalization is a prominent feature of the inventory. In the central Malekula region, Neverver is known for its trills, particularly the prenasalized bilabial trill which appears with considerable frequency in the corpus. The bilabial trill segment is also found in related Malekula languages including Avava (Crowley 2006a: 25), Unua (Elizabeth Pearce, pers. comm.) and Northeast Malekula (Ross McKerras, pers. comm.).

Noticeably absent from the consonant inventory is a series of labio-velars. These sounds are found in some of Neverver's neighbours including Neve'ei (Musgrave 2007) and Avava (Crowley 2006a). The lack of labio-velars is shared with the moribund Naman language (Crowley 2006b), as well as V'ënen Taut (Fox 1979). Pearce (pers. comm.) identifies just one or two lexical items in Unua with a labio-velar consonant. Unusually for Malekula languages, Neverver has a prenasalized affricate segment. This voiced segment has also been identified in the Espiegle's Bay variety of Malua Bay on Malekula, where it contrasts with a plain voiceless affricate (author's own fieldnotes).

2.2. Distinctive features for Neverver consonants

When describing consonants in Neverver using distinctive features, we must distinguish between plain segments and prenasalized segments. Plain segments are characterized by single values associated with each distinctive feature. A simple matrix can be produced for each segment. Eight features are employed to distinguish between the thirteen plain segments, displayed in Table 5. The features employed in this analysis follow Katamba (1989, based on Chomsky and Halle 1968).

Table 5. Distinctive features for plain segments

	m	n	ŋ	p	t	k	β	s	ɣ	r	l	j	w
±sonorant	+	+	+	–	–	–	–	–	–	+	+	+	+
±continuant	–	–	–	–	–	–	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
±nasal	+	+	+	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
±voice	+	+	+	–	–	–	+	–	+	+	+	+	+
±labial	+	–	–	+	–	–	+	–	–	–	–	–	+
±anterior	+	+	–	+	+	–	+	+	–	+	+	–	–
±strident								+		–	–		
±lateral										–	+		