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# Language Contexts: Paluai, also known as Pam-Baluan (Papua New Guinea)

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**Language Name:** Paluai (also Pam-Baluan)

**Language Family:** Admiralties cluster, Oceanic, Austronesian

**ISO 639-3 Code:** BLQ

**Glottolog Code:** balu257

**Population:** ~2,000-3,000

**Location:** -2.56, 147.28

**Vitality rating:** EGIDs No official rating

## Abstract

*Paluai*, also known as *Pam-Baluan*, is an Oceanic language spoken on Baluan Island in Manus Province, Papua New Guinea. The total number of speakers is estimated to be 2,000-3,000. Although Paluai is relatively vibrant and passed on to younger generations, bilingualism with Tok Pisin is ubiquitous and there may be language shift taking place in some domains. The article discusses these issues, in addition to the language's embeddedness in its environment and socio-cultural context, both related to elements of present-day life (economy, education, religion) and more traditional aspects such as song and music, customary ceremonies and naming practices.

## 1. Introduction

Paluai is an Oceanic language spoken on Baluan, a small island located south-east of the main island of Manus Province in Papua New Guinea (PNG); see Figure 1. (Note that the far western island groups and languages in Manus Province are not shown on this map.) PNG has the highest rate of linguistic diversity in the world in terms of number of unrelated language phyla (Nettle 1999: 34). Many of the languages spoken there can be classified as endangered, due to lack of intergenerational transmission and the high pressure of more dominant languages, in particular English and the national

creole Tok Pisin. Manus Province, located north-east of the PNG mainland, consists of the relatively large Manus Island (commonly referred to as the ‘big place’ or ‘mainland’ within the province) and a large number of surrounding islands. In the province, around 30 languages are spoken, all of which belong to the Oceanic subgroup of the Austronesian language family (Lynch et al. 2002: 10).

Two languages are spoken on Baluan Island: Titan, which is also spoken in several locations on Manus Island and on a number of other islands in the province, and Paluai, more commonly known as Pam-Baluan (Simons & Fennig 2017). Although the latter name is better known to the wider world, native speakers prefer to use the autodenomination Paluai to refer to their island, language and group identity. This practice will be followed throughout this paper.<sup>1</sup> The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) provides a language map that lists the number of speakers as 2,000, based on the 2000 Census.<sup>2</sup> More recent figures from the 2011 Census show the total number of inhabitants of Balopa LLG, consisting of Baluan, Lou and Pam islands, to be 3,516 (National Statistical Office Papua New Guinea 2014). Paluai is spoken on Baluan and Pam Islands, while Lou language is spoken on Lou Island (see also Section 2.2). Including expatriate Paluai, the number of speakers can be estimated at somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000.

The languages spoken in Manus Province belong to the Admiralties cluster, a higher-order subgroup of Oceanic (Lynch et al. 2002: 94). In contrast to the Oceanic subgroup as a whole, which is relatively well represented in the literature, little is known about the Admiralties languages: ‘the language situation [here] is complex and remains poorly understood’ (Lynch et al. 2002: 123).

This paper focuses on the context, in a very broad sense, in which Paluai is spoken. The description is based on data gathered as part of a language documentation project carried out between 2010 and 2014, resulting in a reference grammar as PhD thesis (Schokkin 2014). Primary data in the form of audio and video recordings and photographs are currently being prepared for deposit in the PARADISEC archive ([www.paradisec.org.au](http://www.paradisec.org.au)). In the current paper, essential historical and sociolinguistic information about the language and a preliminary assessment of its vitality will be provided first. Following that, anthropological research undertaken in the area and the social and cultural environment of the language is discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> Baluan is probably a derivation from the name Paluai which originated in the colonial period. It is unclear how it came about, but outside of the island, the name Baluan rather than Paluai is used to refer to Paluai Island and its inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> This map is accessible at [http://www.sil.org/pacific/png/maps/Manus\\_small.jpg](http://www.sil.org/pacific/png/maps/Manus_small.jpg) [accessed 2018-01-09].

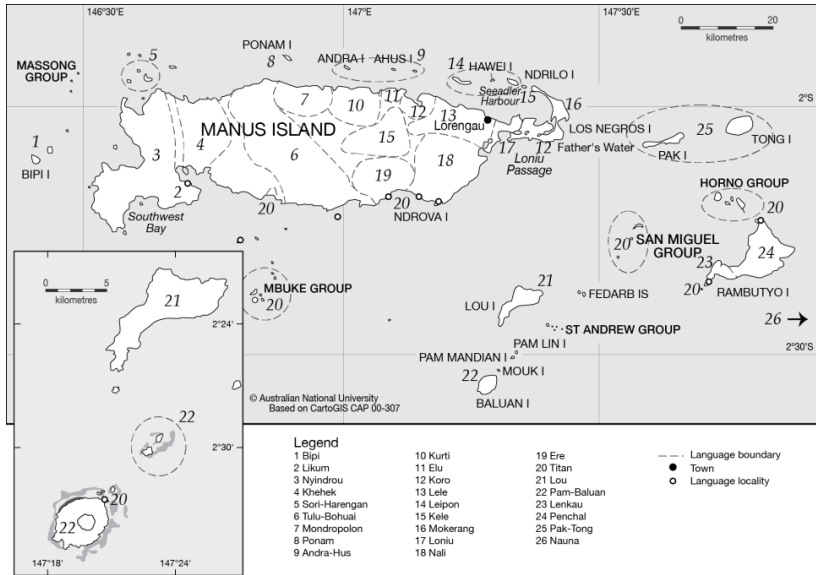


Figure 1: Language map of central and southeastern Manus Province

## 2. Historical linguistic and sociolinguistic context

### 2.1 History, geography and linguistic subgrouping

As noted above, Paluai is a member of the Oceanic subgroup of the Austronesian language family. The geographical region known as Oceania is commonly divided into three areas: *Micronesia* (the area located north-northeast of mainland PNG), *Melanesia* (island New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia and Vanuatu) and *Polynesia* (the remaining and geographically largest part of Oceania, consisting of among others Hawai'i, Samoa, Tuvalu, Tonga, French Polynesia, Easter Island and New Zealand).

What can in general be said about the three areas is that Micronesia and Polynesia are characterised by basically one language per island or island group, with some dialect chaining in Micronesia. In Melanesia, on the other hand, there are typically multiple languages spoken per island or island group. Because of multiple sources of contact (with each other, with non-Oceanic languages, and with non-Austronesian languages), the Oceanic languages of Melanesia have undergone many changes from the protolanguage. Another reason for the major changes may be that in Melanesia language had a more emblematic function than in other parts of Oceania (cf. Lynch 1998: 58), and became an important symbol of group identity; differences between languages may have been exaggerated and actively promoted.

The Admiralties group was established as a proper subgroup of Oceanic based on shared innovations as compared to the protolanguage (Ross 1988), following the conventional methodology of establishing subgroups in historical linguistics. The language situation in PNG and the neighbouring Solomon Islands is highly complex. On mainland PNG, predominantly non-Austronesian languages are spoken (grouped as ‘Papuan’, but in fact consisting of many unrelated phyla), but some areas are predominantly Oceanic. There are also Oceanic enclaves on the mainland, and Papuan areas and enclaves on the islands, which are predominantly Oceanic. Frequent contact with Papuan languages has led to major changes in some of the Oceanic languages of the region. Although there are no non-Austronesian languages spoken in Manus Province at present, archaeological evidence indicates that it was already occupied at the time Austronesian speakers arrived (Ambrose 2002), making it plausible that substrate phenomena still exist in the Oceanic languages spoken there nowadays.

## **2.1 Relations with neighbouring languages**

The language discussed in this paper is spoken in two locations: on Baluan Island and on nearby Pam Island (see Figure 1). There are minor lexical differences between the two varieties, but native speakers generally regard them as ‘the same’. In addition, inhabitants of the two islands perceive their customs as very much alike, and there is considerable intermarriage. Since the observations on which this description is based were done almost exclusively on Baluan Island, we focus on the context in which the language is spoken there, with a number of brief references to language use in other locales, such as the provincial capital Lorengau and major cities in PNG.

On nearby Lou Island, a closely related variety is spoken which is commonly known as Lou (ISO 639-3: loj) (Simons & Fennig 2017); it is considered to have dialectal variation between villages, but the distinctions are minor and mainly of a phonological and lexical nature. In fact, this appears to be predominantly the nature of the differences between Lou and Paluai as well. More discussion of regular sound correspondences between Admiralties languages can be found in Ross (1988). Paluai speakers consider Lou culture to be related to Paluai, but with some pronounced differences. Thus, it can be said that Lou and Paluai are regarded as separate languages based primarily on cultural and political, rather than linguistic, grounds.

Existing sources on the Admiralties languages are relatively limited, in particular extensive grammatical descriptions. A list of references can be found at <http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/admi1239> [accessed 2018-01-09].

## **2.2 Multilingualism**

Every member of the community on Baluan Island acquires Paluai from birth as their native language, with a few exceptions such as in-married women and the Titan speakers in Mouk village. In addition, people acquire Tok Pisin, an English lexifier creole that is an official language of PNG, often from a very early age. English, although gaining ground as the language of mass media, government and education, is not commonly acquired in a home setting, and first exposure to English is usually on entry to primary school around the age of eight. For expatriate Paluai, the situation is often very different. Because they are not part of a stable Paluai speech community, the pressure of Tok Pisin and English is much greater, in particular within mixed marriages. Children growing up away from Baluan Island often acquire only a passive command of the language, and have Tok Pisin, and sometimes English, as their first language.

On Baluan Island, the older generations (about age 50 and upwards) often show at least a passive command of Titan, Lou or both, and occasionally of some other Manus languages, due to long-standing trade contacts between various neighbouring speech communities. These forms of passive bilingualism are declining, since Tok Pisin is increasingly used as an inter-group lingua franca (see Schokkin 2017 for more on Paluai–Tok Pisin contact and its consequences).

## **2.3 Language vitality**

In order to assess language vitality, several extralinguistic factors have to be taken into account. UNESCO (2003) identifies six major factors: (1) intergenerational language transmission, (2) absolute number of speakers, (3) proportion of speakers within the total population, (4) trends in existing language domains, (5) response to new domains and media, and (6) materials for language education and literacy. For the Paluai speech community on Baluan Island, an evaluation of these factors is shown in Table 1. Grades rank from 5 (safe) to zero (extinct); the descriptions are based on UNESCO (2003).

Table 1: Language vitality assessment for Paluai

Factor	Grade	Description
1. Intergenerational transmission	5 (stable yet threatened)	The language is spoken in most contexts by all generations with unbroken intergenerational transmission, yet multilingualism in the native language and one or more dominant language(s) leads to (partial) displacement of Paluai from certain important communication contexts.
2. Absolute # of speakers	4 (unsafe)	Small absolute number of speakers, but this is common for the PNG context.
3. Proportion of speakers within total population	5 (safe)	Almost all community members speak the language. <sup>3</sup>
4. Trends in existing linguistic domains	3 (dwindling domains)	The non-dominant language loses ground and, at home, parents begin to use the dominant language in their everyday interactions with their children, and children become semi-speakers of their own language (receptive bilinguals). Parents and older members of the community tend to be productively bilingual in the dominant and indigenous languages: they understand and speak both. Bilingual children may exist in families where the indigenous language is actively used.
5. Response to new domains and media	2 (coping)	The language is used in some new domains, for example in text messages and on social network sites.
6. Materials for language education and literacy	2	Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; and for others, they may have a symbolic significance. There is no standardised orthography. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the primary school curriculum.

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<sup>3</sup> The most notable exceptions to this are women from other parts of Manus Province or, sometimes, wider PNG, who married Paluai speakers and moved to Baluan Island. After prolonged exposure, however, they usually attain good command of the language.

This assessment paints a rather bleak picture for the future. Although the language scores well on several important factors, namely (1) intergenerational language transmission, and (3) proportion of speakers within the total population (of Baluan Island), it is under severe pressure from Tok Pisin and to a lesser extent English. While multilingualism does not necessarily lead to language loss, in the case of Tok Pisin there is an additional risk. It has an Oceanic substratum, most of which can be traced back to Kuanua (also known as Tolai) (Mosel 1980) and therefore shows many structural similarities to the vernaculars of Manus Province. Tok Pisin is used as a lingua franca in many parts of the country and children start using it so early that the situation can most adequately be described as bilingual acquisition. People have a very pragmatic attitude about the use of Tok Pisin and see it mainly as a way to facilitate intergroup communication between speakers of different languages. Nowadays, however, it is frequently used in intragroup communication as well, leading to extensive code-switching and borrowing.

These language-internal and language-external factors combined provide an environment in which structural borrowing and calquing is ubiquitous, which facilitates convergence and semantic attrition. This is a type of language loss that is more insidious compared to language shift from one variety to another, because it goes relatively unnoticed. Although Paluai speakers pride themselves on the fact that their children still acquire the local vernacular as their first language, in contrast to the situation for some other groups in Manus Province, it is a different, and some would say ‘depleted’, variety compared to what was spoken a few decades ago. Additionally important in this respect is the loss of specialised registers, such as traditional song genres, which are discussed below.

### **3. Socio-cultural context**

#### **3.1 Existing sources on society and culture**

In contrast to the situation in linguistics, a considerable amount of anthropological research has been done in Manus Province. Three main groups were traditionally distinguished: the Usiai people who predominantly live away from the coast on the main island, the Moanus (or Titan) who traditionally did not own land and live in stilt houses on the coast, and the Matankor people of the surrounding islands (Bühler 1935; Nevermann 1934). These are emic distinctions that were adopted by the early ethnographers; however, of these only the Titan can be regarded as an ethnolinguistic unit.

Mead (1930, 1934, 1956) wrote about child rearing and cultural change among the Titan people of Pere. Other classic texts are Fortune (1965) on



religion, Schwartz (1963) on the Paliu Movement, areal culture, cultural totemism and cargo cults, and Carrier & Carrier (1989) on kinship, exchange and trade. Valuable work on material culture in Manus was done by Ohnemus (2002); other recent anthropological sources focusing on Manus are Wanek (1996), Dalsgaard (2009) and Otto (see below for references).

In the following sections, the focus is on the social and cultural background of the Paluai speech community. For reasons of space, the overview given here can only be very fragmentary. For more in-depth discussion of cultural practices on Baluan Island, the reader is referred to the anthropological work of Otto and associates (see Otto 1991, 1992, 2002, 2011; Otto & Pedersen 2005; and Dalsgaard & Otto 2011 for written resources, and the ethnographic films Suhr & Otto 2009, and Suhr & Otto 2011).

### **3.2 Natural environment**

Baluan is a small conical island approximately 5 km in diameter. Its highest point, at 230 metres above sea level, is the crater rim of an inactive volcano in the middle of the island. The sides of the old volcano are densely forested, although large parts are cleared for garden land and plantations. The island is surrounded by coral reefs and some smaller uninhabited islets. On the east and south sides there are a number of beaches.

There is no source of fresh water on Baluan; drinking water is obtained by catching rain water in large tanks. There are no dangerous animals or insects, although mosquitoes present an annoyance and a health risk in the form of malaria. There are mammals, mainly possums and wild pigs, which are hunted for their meat and nearly extinct on Baluan, and bird life is abundant. Eggs of a large bird known as ‘wild fowl’ (probably a common megapode species) are dug up for consumption. The surrounding coral reefs provide a good supply of fish and crustaceans. Larger marine animals such as dugong and sea turtles are also hunted for their meat.

### **3.3 Economy**

Most inhabitants of Baluan practice subsistence-based agriculture supplemented with fishing. Because of its volcanic soil, Baluan is more fertile than most islands in Manus Province. People are therefore able to tend gardens in which they grow taro, yams, pawpaw, banana, sweet potato, cassava (*tapiok*), pineapple, sugarcane, corn and other staples, often with multiple harvests a year. Other fruits and nuts, such as breadfruit, mangoes and coconuts, are gathered from trees growing all over the island. There is an abundance of fish and shellfish, occasionally supplemented with chicken, turtle or pork, the latter exclusively for ceremonial purposes. Chickens are

kept for eggs as well as for meat; pigs are often kept in small dens above the water line near the shore, and are a very valuable possession. Betel nut, combined with piper betle leaf and lime (obtained from coral), is widely used as a stimulant.

In pre-colonial times, Baluan people were self-sufficient to a large extent and did not depend much on other groups for food, although they traded with other islands to obtain important goods such as obsidian, sago and pottery. This situation, which differed from that of various other groups in Manus who specialised in either gardening or fishing, does not seem to have changed much over time. There are several markets on the island where garden crops, smoked and fresh fish, and occasionally goods from stores, are bought and sold. Non-indigenous foodstuffs such as flour, rice, tea, coffee and sugar are obtained from stores in Lorengau, the provincial capital located on Manus Island. There are a number of copra and cocoa plantations, but produce from these is traded only if prices are good. Due to its relative remoteness within the province, it is not easy for the Baluan people to profitably sell their garden produce in the market in Lorengau, since high petrol prices for transportation often pose a problem.

Since the 1970s, an important source of income is remittances from people who work outside the island, mainly in Lorengau, Port Moresby, and Lae. Otto (1991) argues that this work-related migration has had social, economic, and ideological effects on the community. Firstly, new ideas were brought in and this made people regard their own culture in a more detached and objective way. Secondly, younger men were absent for a prolonged period and the usual course of events concerning succession was thus disrupted. Relationships and power dynamics between young and old changed: the younger generations would, e.g., lack local knowledge and the related power, but would be more prosperous. Also, opinions between generations may differ about the ways in which traditional culture should be preserved and perhaps monetized.

Most of the people who work elsewhere eventually return to the island and upon their return are dependent on the knowledge and goodwill of their relatives who stayed behind, in order to obtain access to land and to acquire technological skills to build a house, tend a garden etc. For this reason, many expatriates feel a high pressure to keep sending remittances regularly and to bring large quantities of gifts whenever they visit Baluan. Another economic change that the remittances system may contribute to is the creation of a 'welfare society' (Zollinger (1982) quoted in Otto 1991: 221). Remittances raised the standard of living on Baluan Island to a much higher level than would otherwise be possible, and this relative affluence compared to other rural parts of PNG is still noticeable today.

### **3.4 Demography and settlement patterns**

The division of language on Baluan Island goes together with a division of labour. The speakers of Paluai are predominantly agriculturists but also catch fish, while the Titan people are predominantly fishermen, who nowadays also keep gardens to a limited extent. The Paluai speakers were the first occupants of the island, with the Titan speakers only settling permanently on Baluan in the 1940s, when they were invited by the Paluai (Otto 1992: 264). Before that, they had been living for some years around the tiny islet of Mouk just off the Baluan coast, which their village is named after. The Titans are a seafaring people who stem from the lagoon village Pere off the south coast of Manus mainland and a number of smaller islands. Titan is therefore spoken in six to seven different locations. Otto (1991) mentions that the Mouk people were probably permitted to live close to Baluan Island because they provided protection against other Titan-speaking groups.

There is a fair degree of intermarriage between the larger Paluai-speaking population and people from Mouk village, and, as mentioned, many Paluai have at least a passive command of Titan. However, the general consensus among the Paluai seems to be that Titan speakers tend not to pass their language on to their children, using Tok Pisin instead, and in mixed marriages the latter seems even more likely. I spent a considerable amount of time with one Titan-Paluai family, but I do not have sufficient firsthand information to either confirm or reject this suggestion.

The Paluai-speaking population is spread over six villages, most of them on the north coast, while a large group of expatriates work in urban areas. See Figure 2 (over) for a map of the island. Most villages are near the shore, but there are a couple of small hamlets on the flank of the mountain. Traditional building and clothing styles have been largely abandoned in favour of wooden houses with corrugated iron roofs and Western-style clothing, although kitchens are still often built from traditional materials such as sago leaves (see Figure 3). Houses are elevated from the ground, often with a front veranda, and a separate building for cooking. Garden plots are not located near houses, and people travel to and fro by canoe and on foot. All land on Baluan is subject to traditional claims by the various descent groups. Cemeteries are located exclusively on land belonging to the respective lineages, but usufruct rights for gardening are sometimes passed on to others. Knowledge about land ownership is a very valuable asset, and is normally not given freely by elders; younger members of a lineage have to give something in exchange in order to obtain this knowledge (cf. Otto 1991).



Figure 2: Map of Baluan Island (from Otto, 1991: 46)



Figure 3: A kitchen building made from sago leaves

### **3.5 Education**

There are three elementary schools, providing grades preparatory, 1 and 2, and two primary schools (providing grades 3 to 6) on the island. As mentioned, children are taught exclusively in English from grade 3. For follow-up education, from grade 9 onwards, children have to go to Manus Island. Education is highly valued in Paluai society because it gives access to Western-style knowledge. Educated people are able to obtain white-collar jobs in urban areas, remittances from which can benefit their relatives on the island. This system is still in use, although it may have become less profitable in recent years due to more competition on the labour market.

The official educational policy in PNG is to facilitate and encourage the use of local vernaculars in elementary schools. Grade 3 should provide a 'bridging' period, to prepare for English-only education. Due to several factors, this policy does not work well. Firstly, the financial burden for providing elementary school buildings and materials mainly lies with local communities, and thus there is often no funding or expertise for school materials in the local language. Secondly, teacher training is minimal, both for the elementary and primary level, and teachers sometimes have limited command of English. Elementary school teachers are usually local people, and thus can provide education in the vernacular, but primary school teachers are often recruited from elsewhere in PNG. Since they do not speak the vernacular, and children do not have sufficient command of English, they will revert to the language that they have in common – Tok Pisin, which ends up being the language mostly in use in the classroom.

Unfortunately, people tend to blame vernacular education rather than lack of teacher training for the fact that children have insufficient command of English, which does not bode well for the future. Good command of English is seen as a prerequisite for successfully completing higher education, which is, as mentioned, highly valued in Paluai culture. In fact, the Provincial Government of Manus now seems to have completely abolished teaching in the vernaculars, since it is seen as a barrier for the acquisition of English.



Figure 4: Pumbanin primary school

### 3.6 Religion

The entire population of Baluan have been Christians since the 1930s, with the two largest denominations being Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists. During church services, Tok Pisin is generally used, but occasionally collective prayers are said in Paluai; there are a few hymns in the local language.

The Paliu Movement, including the *Makasol* or *Win Nesion* ('breath nation') church, must also be mentioned in this context. The movement is named after its founder Paliu Maloat (ca. 1900-1991), who was from Lipan village on Baluan Island. He is seen as a political as well as a religious leader, and the tremendous impact of his emancipation movement is still felt in present-day Manus. Initially, pre-independence, Paliu propagated the abolition of traditional ways, as he believed those were restraining the indigenous population and keeping them from becoming equal to the white colonisers. Many communities left their traditional practices, and destroyed goods associated with them during cargo cults. Later, Paliu changed his views, and the last few decades have

seen a revival of tradition on Baluan. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the rise of the movement and its present-day impact in detail; Otto (1991 and later) provides an excellent account.

Traditional belief systems are still practiced as well, particularly in connection with illness and curing. When a person dies, their soul becomes a free-ranging spirit (*silal*) (Otto 1991: 119) which is considered very powerful, and although they are generally benevolent, they can take souls away, resulting in illness and, if not treated in time, in death. This may happen when there is a disagreement between members of a lineage, or when a lineage member asks for retaliation for some perceived wrongdoing by speaking to the ancestor spirit (*tenten*). In addition, evil spirits that roam in the bush (*pwalei*) can cause illness. One's ancestral spirits usually form a protection against *pwalei*, but visitors, who do not have this protection, can become sick easily.

A divination ritual, using betel nut, lime, a piper beetle leaf and saliva, can be carried out in order to discover the cause of an illness. Once the cause is known, treatment can be determined, usually involving reconciliation of the social conflict and payment of compensation (Otto 1991: 120). Other causes for illness are identified, such as breaching food taboos (*napun*), or sorcery.

### 3.7 Traditional arts, crafts and speech genres

Traditional products include wooden canoes with outriggers, different types of woven bags made from tree bark or coconut leaves, and *kil* (known as *garamuts* in Tok Pisin, or log drums) made of wood. Traditional items of clothing include grass skirts for women and bark cloths for men. Drumbeats play a very important role in traditional ceremonies, accompanied by dance. In addition to a number of 'general' beats that many people know how to perform, each clan also has its own specific beats for special occasions, performed only by some clan members. Although people are very proud of this part of their culture, the danger exists that this specialised knowledge will disappear over time. This has practically already happened with traditional chanting. Three types are distinguished: *polpolot*, *weyi* and *kolorai*. They consist of a two-part chant, each type with its own distinctive melody; for more details, see Messner (1981) and Lewis (2017). *Polpolot* is performed by two men or women, generally for enjoyment. *Weyi* has two varieties: one performed by two men, and one by two women. It is performed for enjoyment, or for sad occasions such as a death. *Kolorai*, the type with the highest status, used to be performed by two men at the time of a death, and was accompanied by a special drumbeat. Unfortunately these musical genres, including the specific register of Paluai that is used for them, are now moribund. The few remaining people that have active knowledge of the chants

and the linguistic register are now elderly and no longer physically able to perform them properly. There are a number of younger speakers that are able to perform some chants, but they have only passive knowledge and do not know, for instance, how to compose new chants.

### 3.8 Societal and political organisation

In pre-colonial Manus, villages were the largest political units (Otto 2002: 31). A village is referred to as ‘place’ (*panu*), consisting of several ‘little places’ (*panu sê*), all of which have proper names. A village consists of one or several clans (*pusungop*), groups of people who consider themselves related through descent from a common ancestor. A clan, in its turn, consists of several ‘houses’ or lineages (*wum*), which carry the name of the ancestor who founded them. They can be regarded as patrilineal descent groups that own land and other kinds of property. A house of high status, including its leader, is called *lapan*; houses of lesser status, which follow a house of higher status, are called *lau*.

Warfare was common between different groups on Manus, and was one of the ways in which a *lapan* could demonstrate his leadership and/or acquire status. Another means was by organising a large feast; on Baluan these feasts were organised for a deceased *lapan* by his successor, with preparations sometimes taking several years. During the feast, large numbers of pigs and other products were distributed to specific related kin groups and allies: ‘The *lapan* primarily gave to the family of his predecessor’s mother, thus paying off the debt to this group for providing the woman who gave birth to the deceased leader’ (Otto 2002: 34). The success of the feast was measured by the amount of food and goods that were distributed. Nowadays, these feasts are no longer given, however it could be said that they live on in the altered form of cultural and harvest festivals.

After colonisation, another layer of government was added. Eventually, three domains of power came to be established: *kastam*, which refers to the traditional ways, *lotu*, the sphere of religious institutions, and *gavman*, referring to ‘Western-type government, education, and development’ (Otto 1991: 9).<sup>4</sup> They affect each other in many intricate ways, as demonstrated in Otto (2011).

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<sup>4</sup> The terms *kastam*, *lotu* and *gavman* are Tok Pisin. *Kastam* and *gavman* are based on English ‘custom’ and ‘government’, while *lotu* is based on an Oceanic substrate term meaning ‘worship’.



### 3.9 Kinship and marriage

Genealogies are considered very important, and people are often able to trace their kinship histories six generations back. This is necessary in order to properly carry out the many traditional ceremonies (*puron*) on Baluan, and also to be able to make claims about land ownership. Because genealogies are so complex, and related to interests, they are often subject to disputes. Most Paluai kinship terms are inalienably possessed, and the kinship system is very elaborate, but use of many of the terms is under pressure from Tok Pisin. Schokkin & Otto (2017) discuss the kinship terminology and system, and its socio-cultural embeddedness, in more detail.

Cross-cousins of the second degree or further removed are considered the best candidates for marriage. Traditionally, marriage is arranged by parents and always occurs outside the clan (exogamy). Arranged marriages, however, are on the wane due to changes in attitudes and demography, and there is an increasing prevalence of intermarriage with people from culturally and linguistically distinct groups. After marriage, the wife normally lives in the village of her husband (virilocal settlement). Affinal kin are in a respectful relationship with each other: preferably, the address form *polam* is used as a sign of respect, rather than the person's proper name.

Birth, marriage and death are important life events accompanied by traditional celebrations, which always involve a gift exchange. These ceremonies (*puron*, or *kastamwok* in Tok Pisin) played a very important role in traditional culture, but were abolished by the Paliau Movement. Revival of tradition started in the 1960s, and has intensified in the last two to three decades (see Otto 2011). At bride price ceremonies (*mosap*), large quantities of food are given by the bride's kin to the groom's kin; this is reciprocated by the groom's kin in the form of a cash bride price. After a death, a large exchange of goods and cash (*pailou*) takes place. In all these cases, PNG money has replaced traditional money in the form of dog's teeth (*lipan mui*) and shell beads (*sapul*), which were largely destroyed during cargo cults in the 1950s.



Figure 5: Sign making the announcement of the amounts of money collected from the father's and mother's side for a bride price



Figure 6: Redistributing the amounts of money and gifts collected from various groups at a pailou ceremony after a death

### 3.10 Naming practices

Paluai has an interesting system of birth-order terms, shown in Table 2. Every child has a birth order ‘name’ which indicates his or her rank in the order of siblings of the same sex. Such a system is also encountered in several other Manus languages, and the terms may have a common origin (Holzknecht 1992). On Baluan, their most common use is as proper names, for both address and reference; the latter often in combination with the mother’s or father’s name or a nickname, to avoid confusion. The only birth order term not used in this function is that for the first-born son. Both series have an eighth term *Ngaipwên*, literally meaning ‘no name’. In addition to the birth order term, children are assigned several names; they are generally named after one or more of their ancestors and also receive a Christian name. Traditional names are considered clan property.

Table 2: Birth order terms

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
1	<i>Alup</i>	<i>Meme</i>
2	<i>Asap</i>	<i>Ngî</i>
3	<i>Ninou</i>	<i>Ngat</i>
4	<i>Maiau</i>	<i>Aêwai</i>
5	<i>Ngason</i>	<i>Kuam</i>
6	<i>Non</i>	<i>Yêp</i>
7	<i>Soai</i>	<i>Silip</i>

#### 4. Conclusions

Paluai is an Oceanic language of Papua New Guinea that is vibrant and actively transmitted intergenerationally, unlike many indigenous languages of Papua New Guinea. Despite this, it is under threat from Tok Pisin and to a lesser extent English. Code-switching is pervasive, and the language has very little institutional support in the form of written materials, or systematic use in educational contexts. It shows signs of severe endangerment in domains where it is most closely linked to more traditional elements of the culture it is embedded in, such as the special register used for chanting, or the kinship terminology.



Figure 7: Communal work: building a new jetty

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