

# A Linguistic Perspective on Geographical Names

The 4th United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names (UNGEGN) Training Course  
on Toponymy  
Yogyakarta 17—21 September 2012

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# Introduction

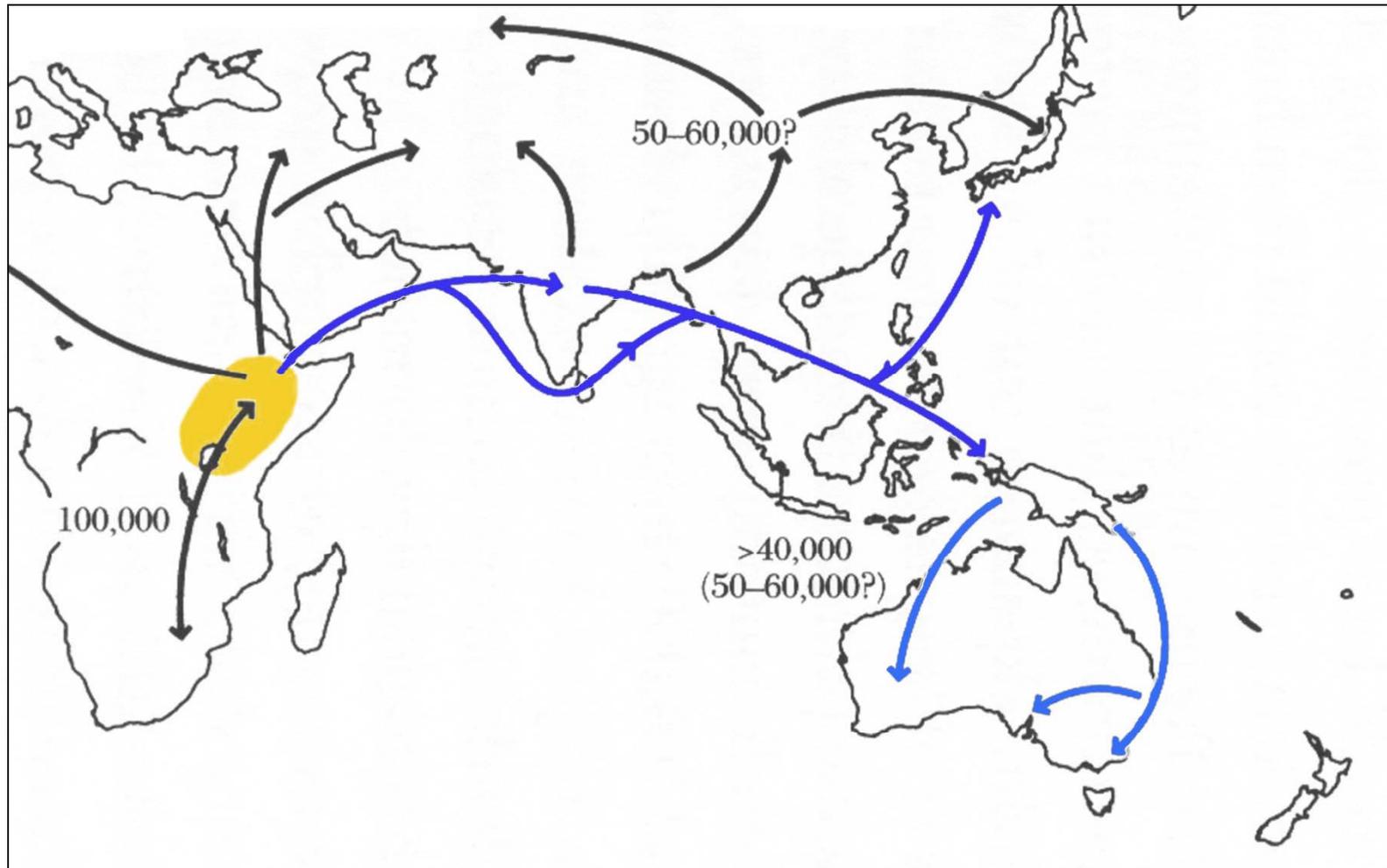
- The identification and naming of all geographical features in Indonesia requires basic information about the regional languages.
- This should start with a description of:
  - Out of Africa: migration of human ancestors
  - Diversity of world languages
  - Languages inventory in Indonesia
  - Distribution of non-Austronesian languages in Indonesia
  - Indigenous language writing system
  - Examples of traditional writings
  - Scope of naming geographical features
  - Conclusions and recommendations
- This should lead to an attempt to identify generic names in regional languages for toponymic features.

# Out of Africa: Migration of Human Ancestors

## Earliest expansions and migrations of human ancestors

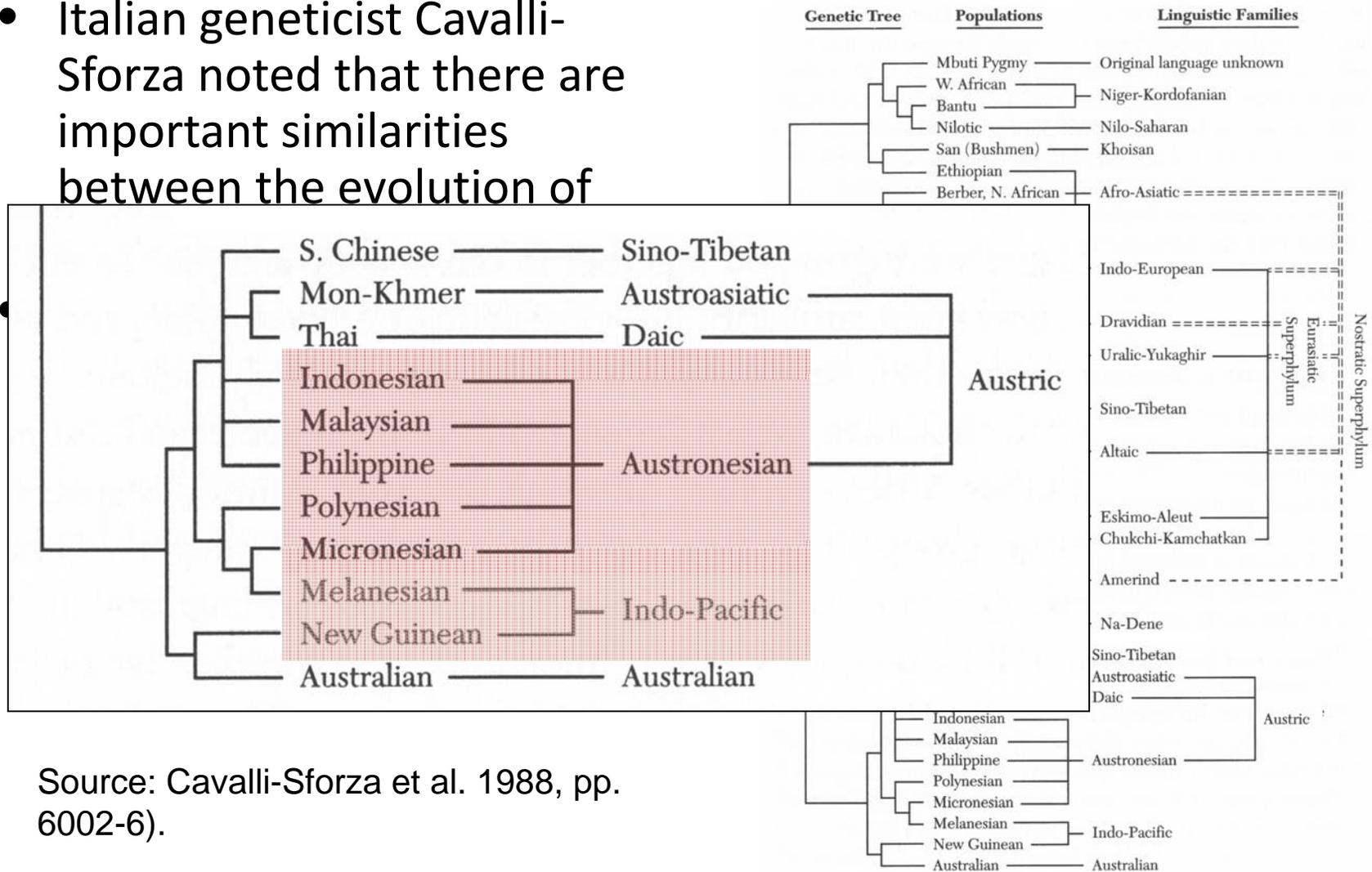
- The following map, the result of multi-disciplinary research, traces the expansions and migrations of human ancestors out of Africa into Europe, Asia and the Americas. It provides approximate dates suggested by the archeological record.

# Map of earliest migrations of human ancestors



# A comparison of genetic and linguistic trees

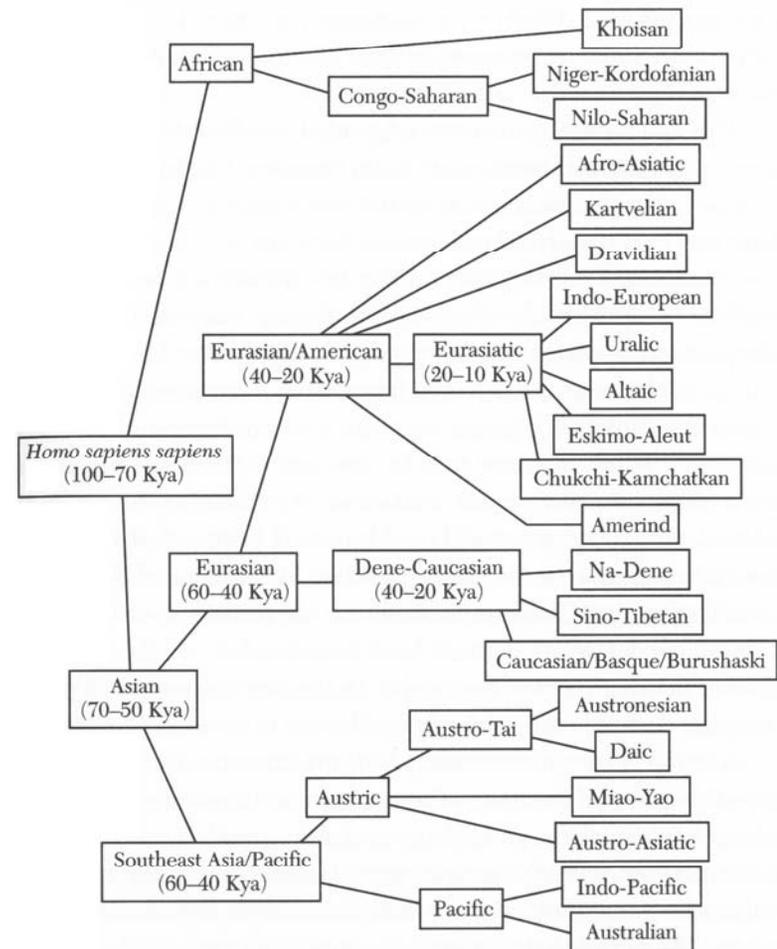
- Italian geneticist Cavalli-Sforza noted that there are important similarities between the evolution of



Source: Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1988, pp. 6002-6).

# Major world language families

- The world's languages can be grouped into about 17 major families (Comrie 2003).
- This figure shows Merritt Ruhlen's version of the origin of human languages. It has taken a number of cues from the genetic tree, correlated them to linguistic information and added new linguistic superfamilies. In this version, Cavalli-Sforza has added some probable dates, with the likely range of initial divergence dates (Kya = 1,000 years ago).



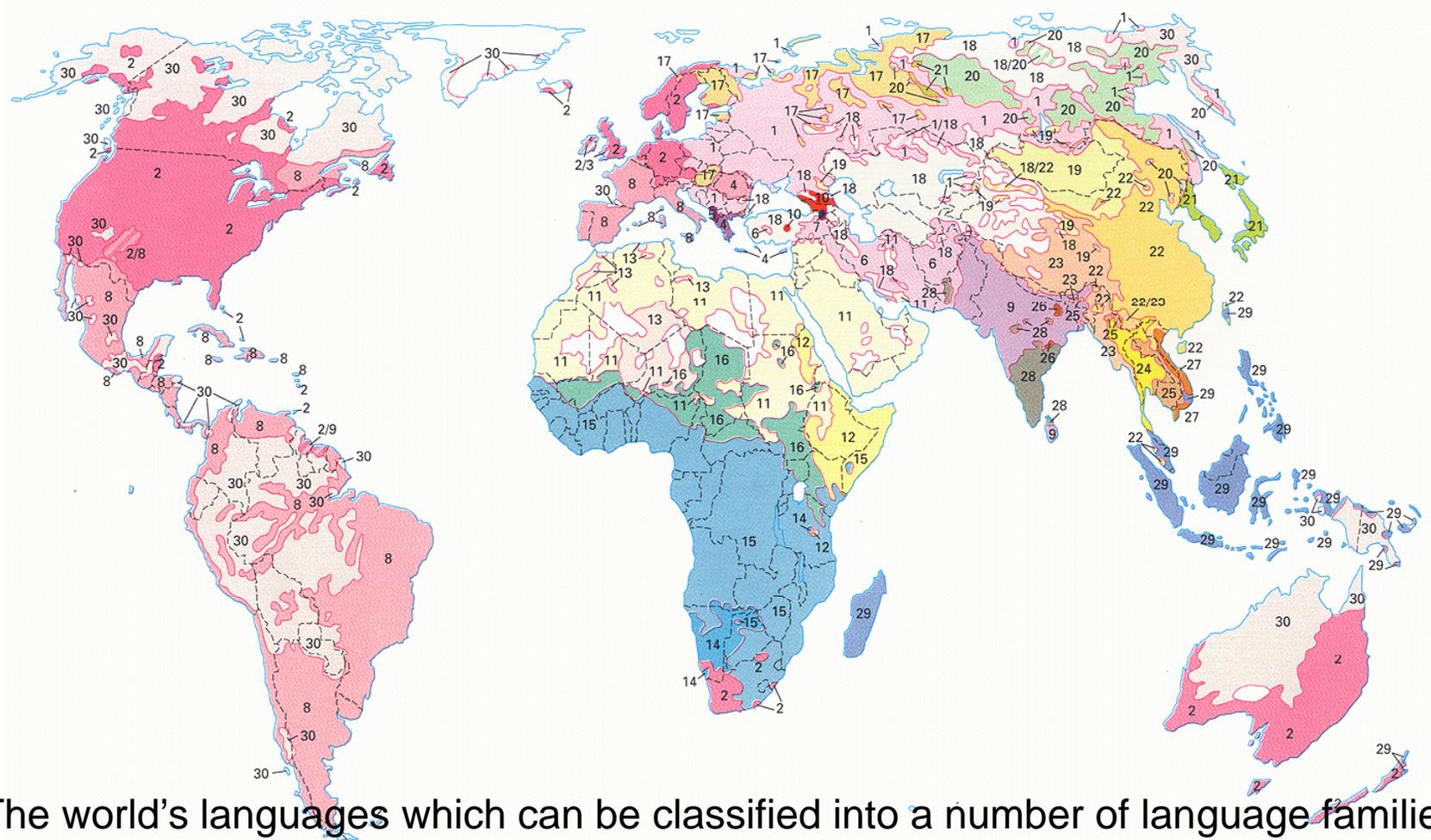
Source: (Cavalli-Sforza 2000: 169)

# Direct descendants of the earliest expansions

- Research that underlies this map now suggests that **the oldest linguistic families must be African**: of the four existing today, Niger-Kordofanian, Nilo-Saharan, Khoisan, and Afro-Asiatic, *Khoisan* is considered to be the oldest.
- Khoisan may be *the most direct descendant of the people who were responsible for the first expansion from Africa to Asia*. According to some anthropologists, the Khoisan (bushmen) people who now live in Southern Africa once lived further north, in East Africa or perhaps even northeastern Africa.
- If this was the case between 50,000 and 80,000 years ago, then they were in the best position to expand to Asia.
- It is true that *of all Africans, East Africans are most similar to Asians* (Cavalli-Sforza 2000:149—168).

# Diversity of World Languages

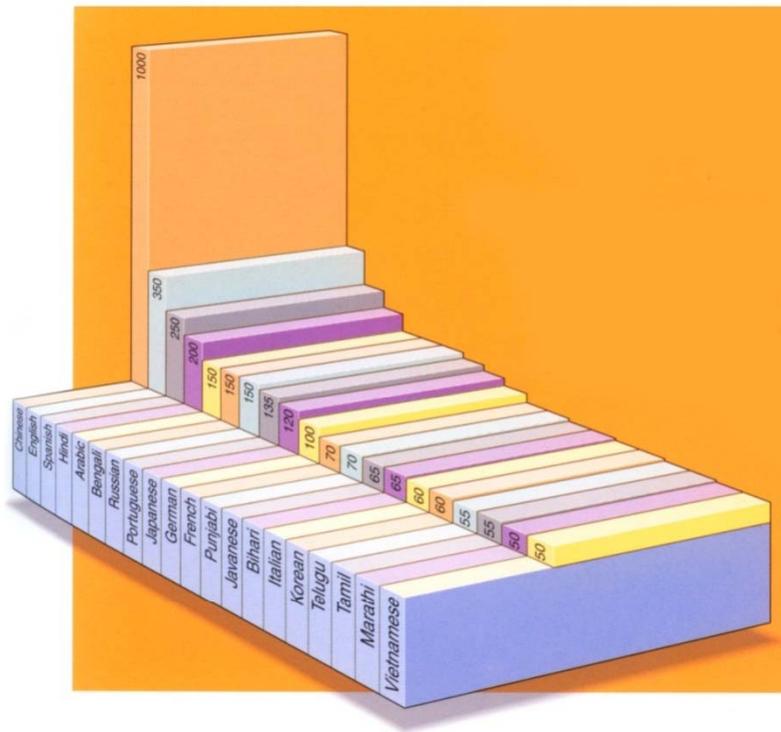
# Major language families



The world's languages which can be classified into a number of language families (Crystal, 1990). The majority of Indonesia's 742 regional languages belong to the Austronesian language family (Lewis, 2009), the rest to the Indo-Pacific (Papuan) family.

# World languages with the most mother tongue speakers

There are about 6000 languages worldwide (Crystal, 1990).



Chinese	1,000	French	70
English	350	Punjabi	70
Spanish	250	Javanese	65
Hindi	200	Bihari	65
Arabic	150	Italian	60
Bengali	150	Korean	60
Russian	150	Telugu	55
Portuguese	135	Tamil	55
Japanese	120	Marathi	50
German	100	Vietnamese	50

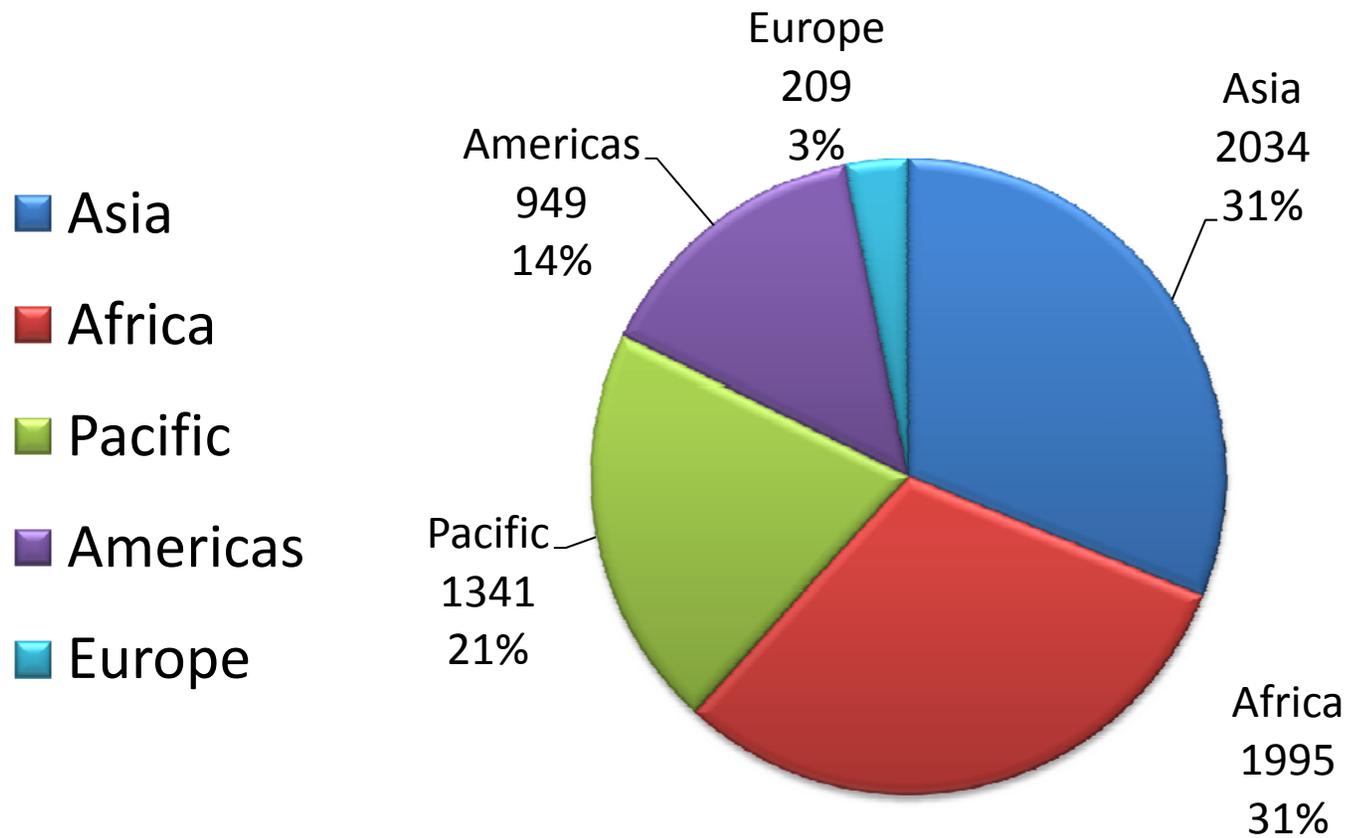
Number of speakers (in millions) Comrie et al. 2003

These are the top twenty with Javanese in 13<sup>th</sup> place.

# A revised list?

- This list may be open to revision. For example:
- More recent data puts the number of speakers of Javanese at 75,200,000 moving it up from 13th to 11th place.
- The label 'Chinese' (1 billion) obscures the fact that it is composed of a number of mutually unintelligible regional varieties, for example Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hokkien. These are actually different languages. Therefore, (Mandarin) Chinese on its own would no longer occupy first place.
- The number of Malay speakers has been underestimated. Indonesian and Malay are mutually intelligible and could be grouped together. Malay (including Indonesian) would thus appear in this ranking (perhaps in 5th place).

# Language Distribution in the World



# Languages Inventory in Indonesia

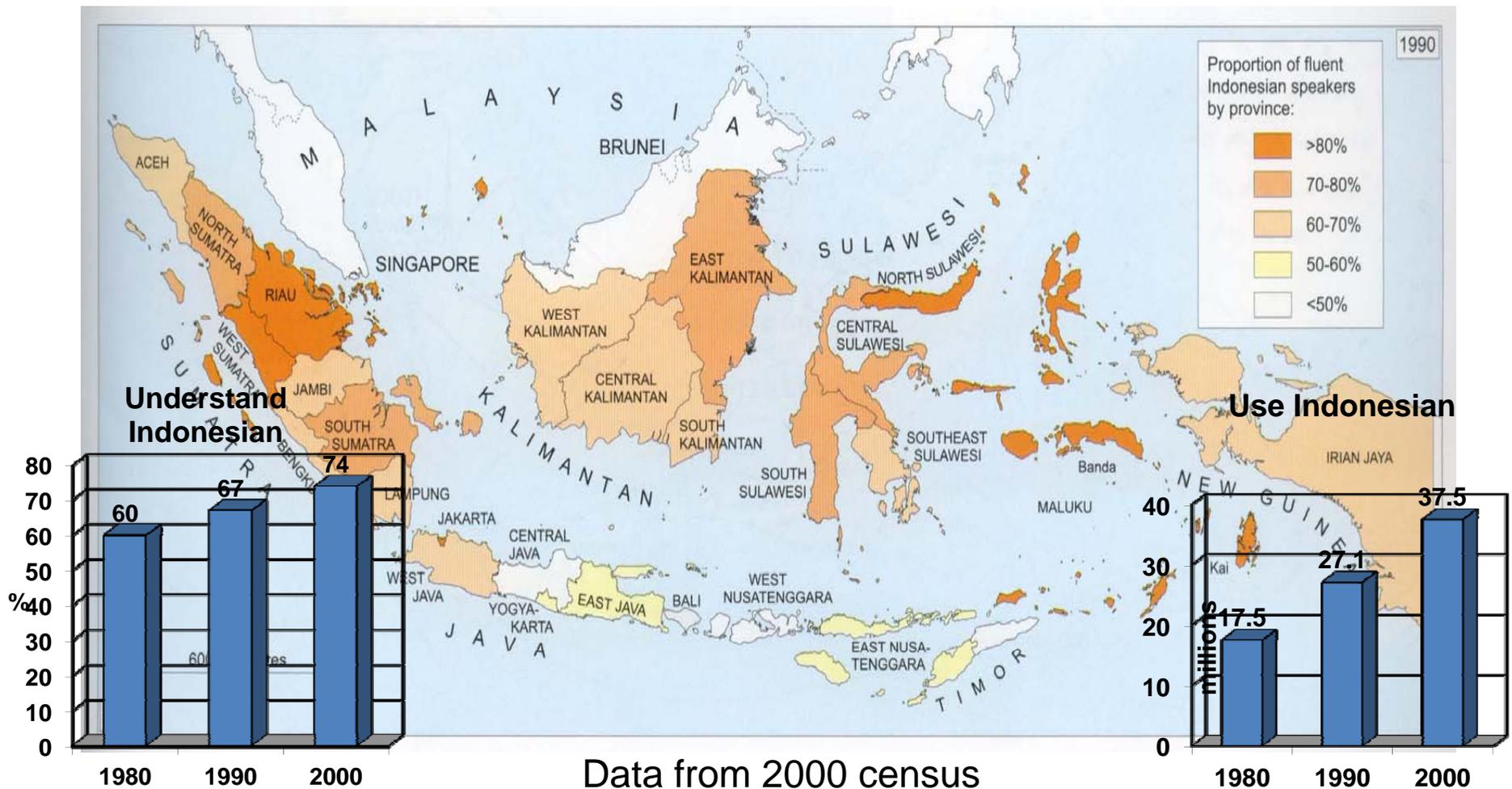
# Difficulty in performing language inventories

- It is not easy to identify how many languages there are or to gather data on them. This is because:
  - Languages which have the same name may be different and languages with different names may be in fact the same. Without field research, it is not possible to know for sure
  - Differing expert definitions of what a language is and what a dialect can lead to a difference of opinion in deciding whether two groups of speakers are using two varieties of the same language, or two different languages
  - Speakers differ in their use or grasp of the language. Defining who a native speaker of a language is, compared to being a second language speaker or a foreign language speaker is problematical; surveying this is even more so
  - Demographic changes (population changes, migration, assimilation) may affect language groups
  - Languages with very few speakers are becoming extinct and even others with larger speaker populations are seeing numbers in decline
  - At the same time, new languages continue to be discovered
    - Crystal (2000)

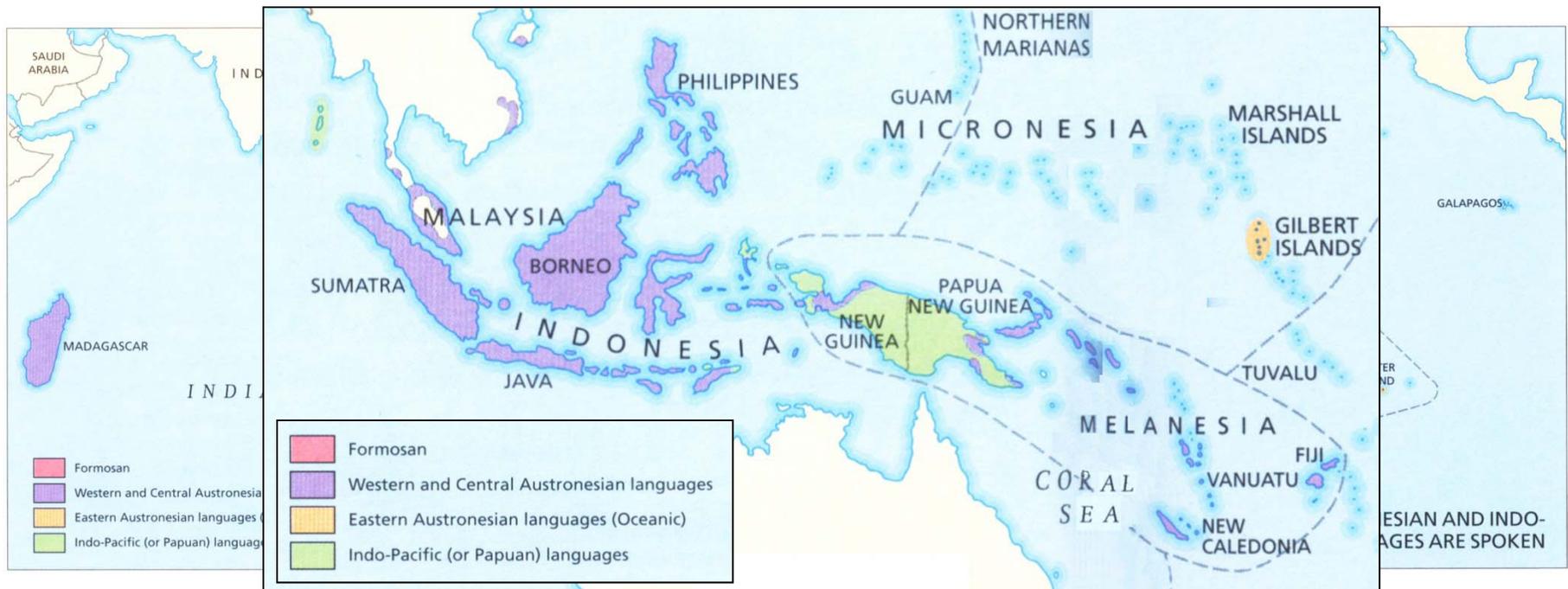
# The use of Indonesian and the regional languages

- Around 85% of Indonesians still use a regional language for daily communication in the home (Muhadjir dan Lauder 1992)
- Only 41-60% of people in NTT, Papua, South Sulawesi and NTB use Indonesian daily at home
- Increases in the use of Indonesian (and decreases in the use of local languages) go hand in hand with increasing access to education
- Based on occupation, farmers and miners have the lowest rates of use of Indonesian daily at home
- Based on religion, adherents of Islam and Hinduism are more likely than other religions to use a regional language daily in the home

# The use of Indonesian is uneven across the country



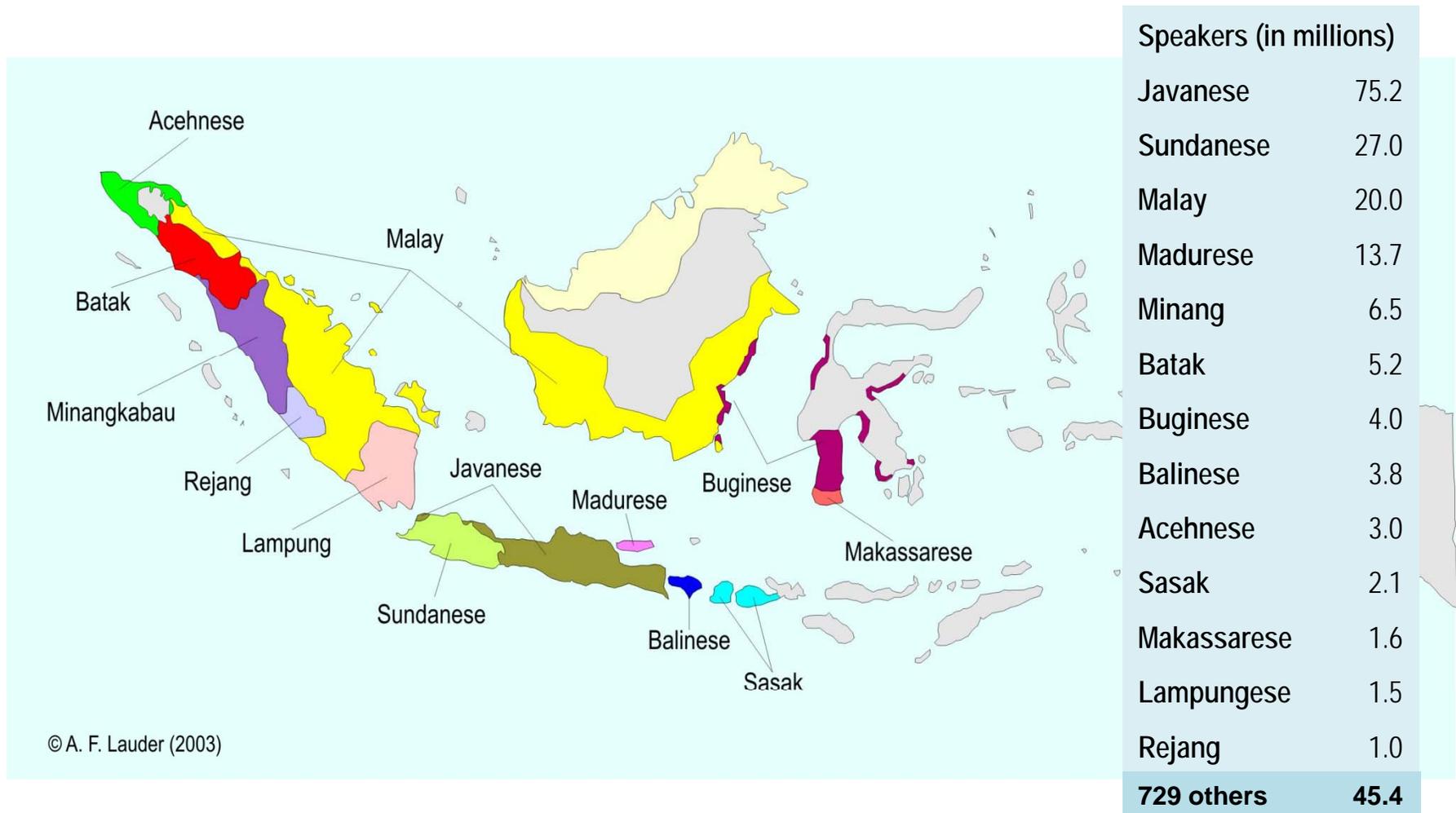
# The spread of Austronesian and Indo-Pacific (Papuan) Languages



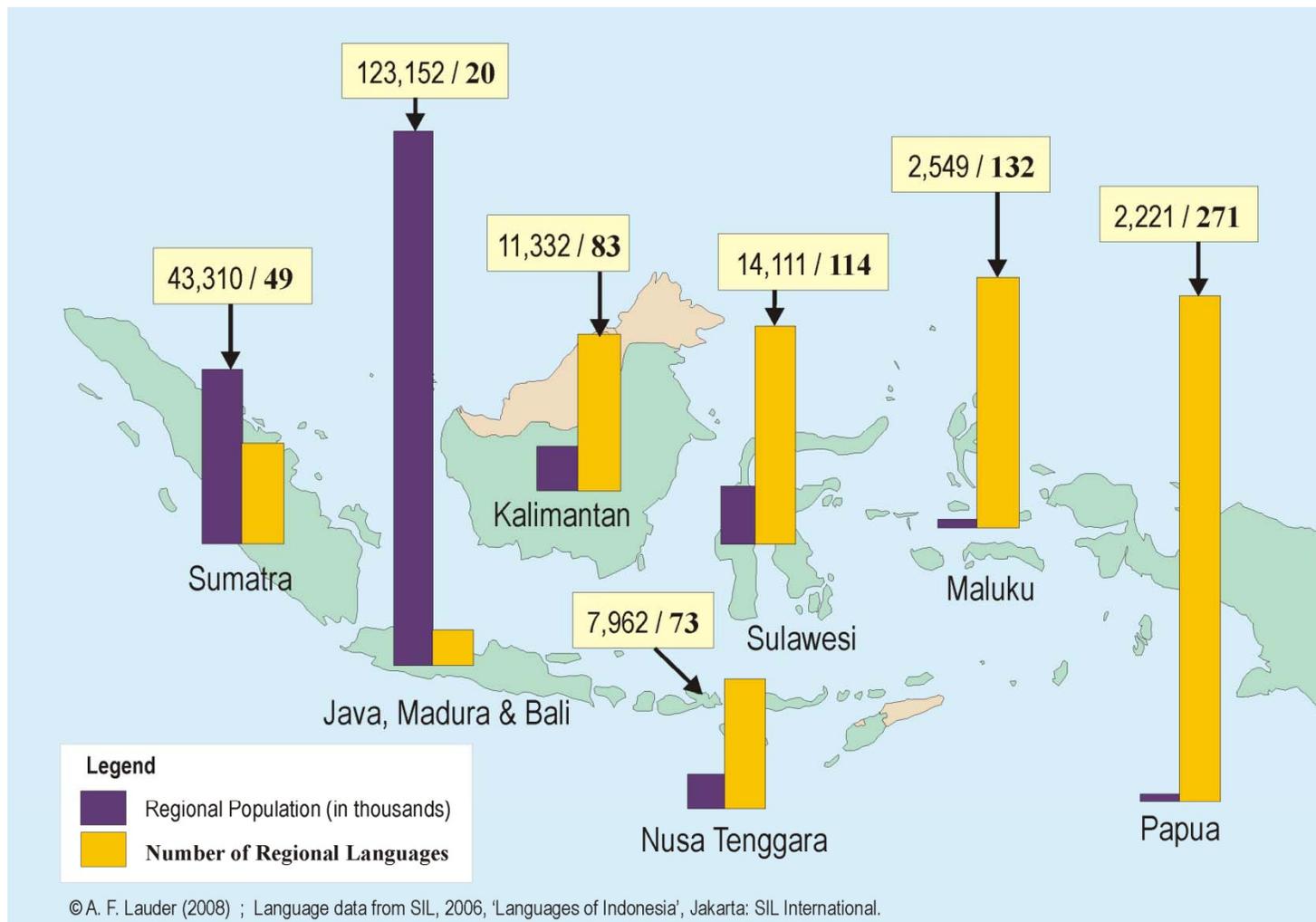
- The Austronesian and Papuan languages are distantly related and found over an extremely wide area.

Source: Crystal, 1997: 320-1

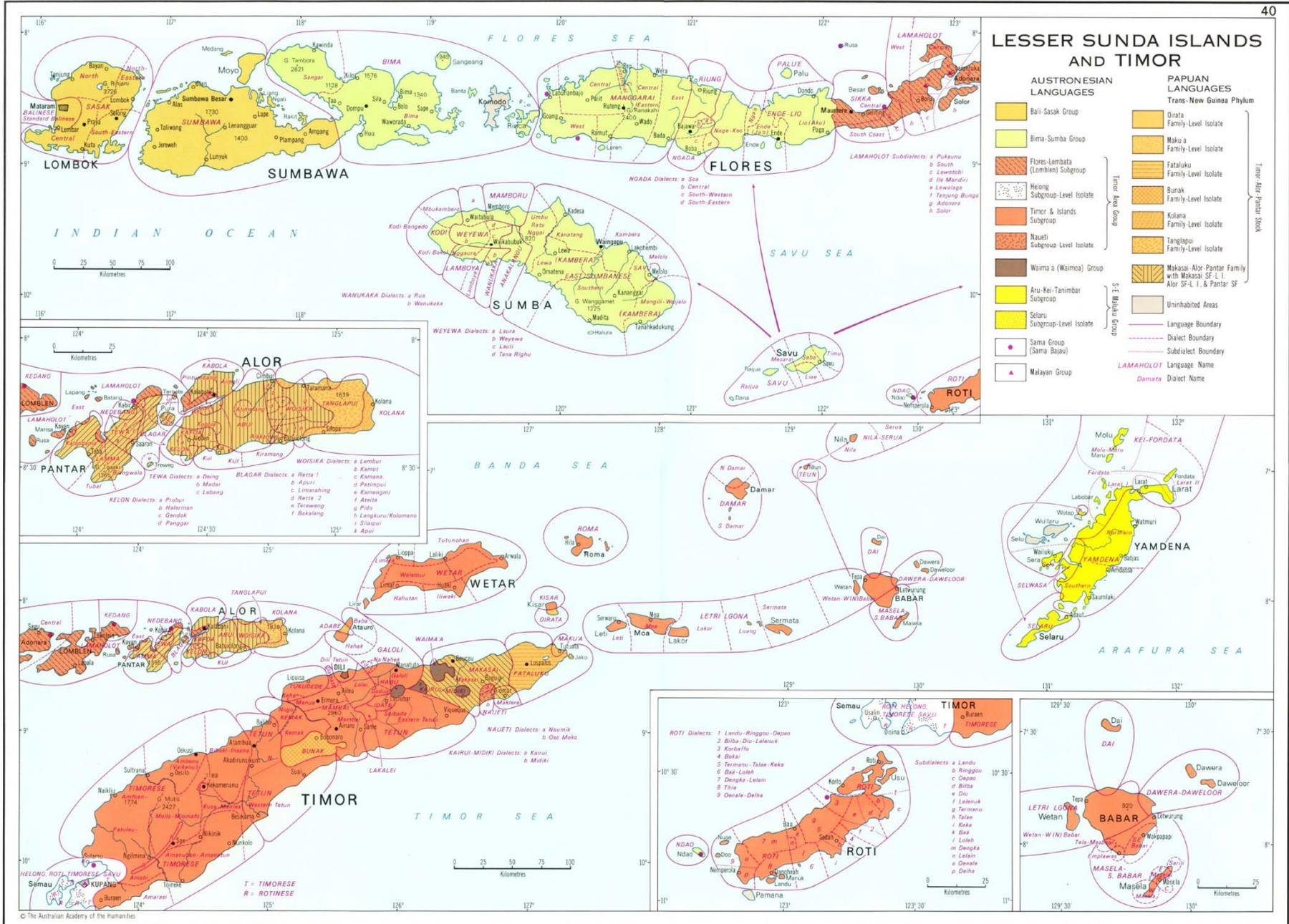
# Distribution of 13 largest Regional languages in Indonesia



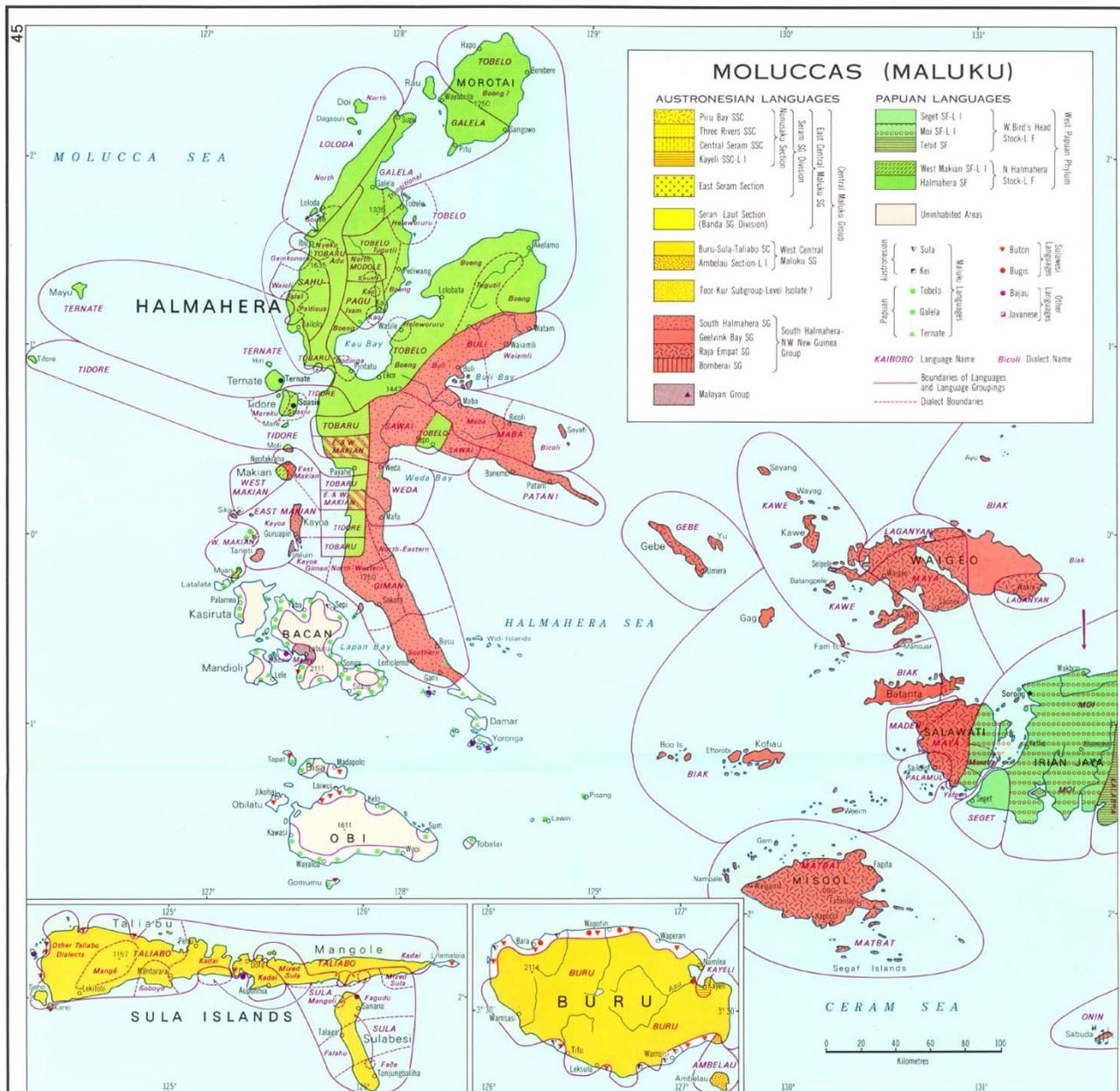
# Ratio between population and number of languages



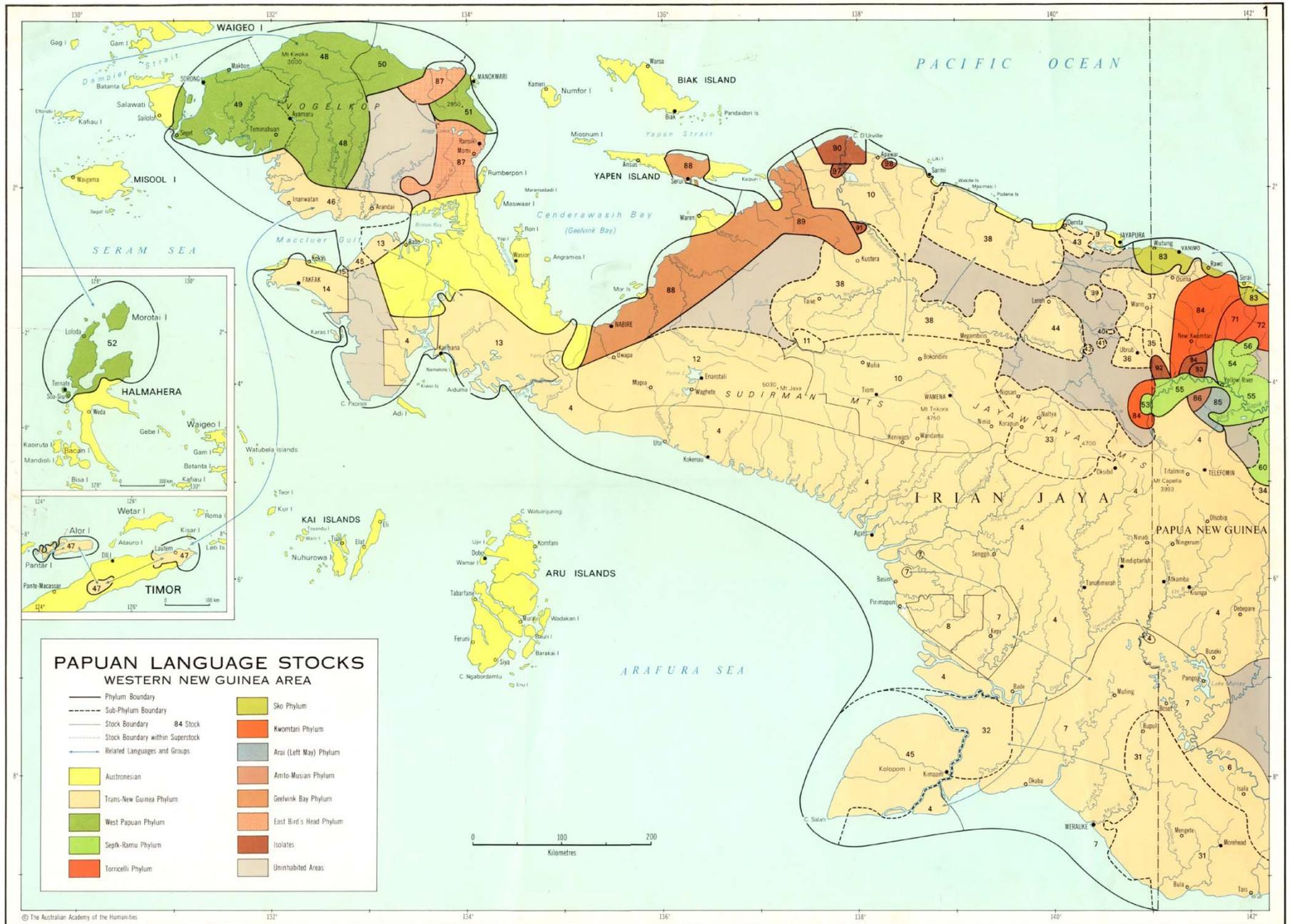
# Distribution of Non-Austronesian Languages in Indonesia



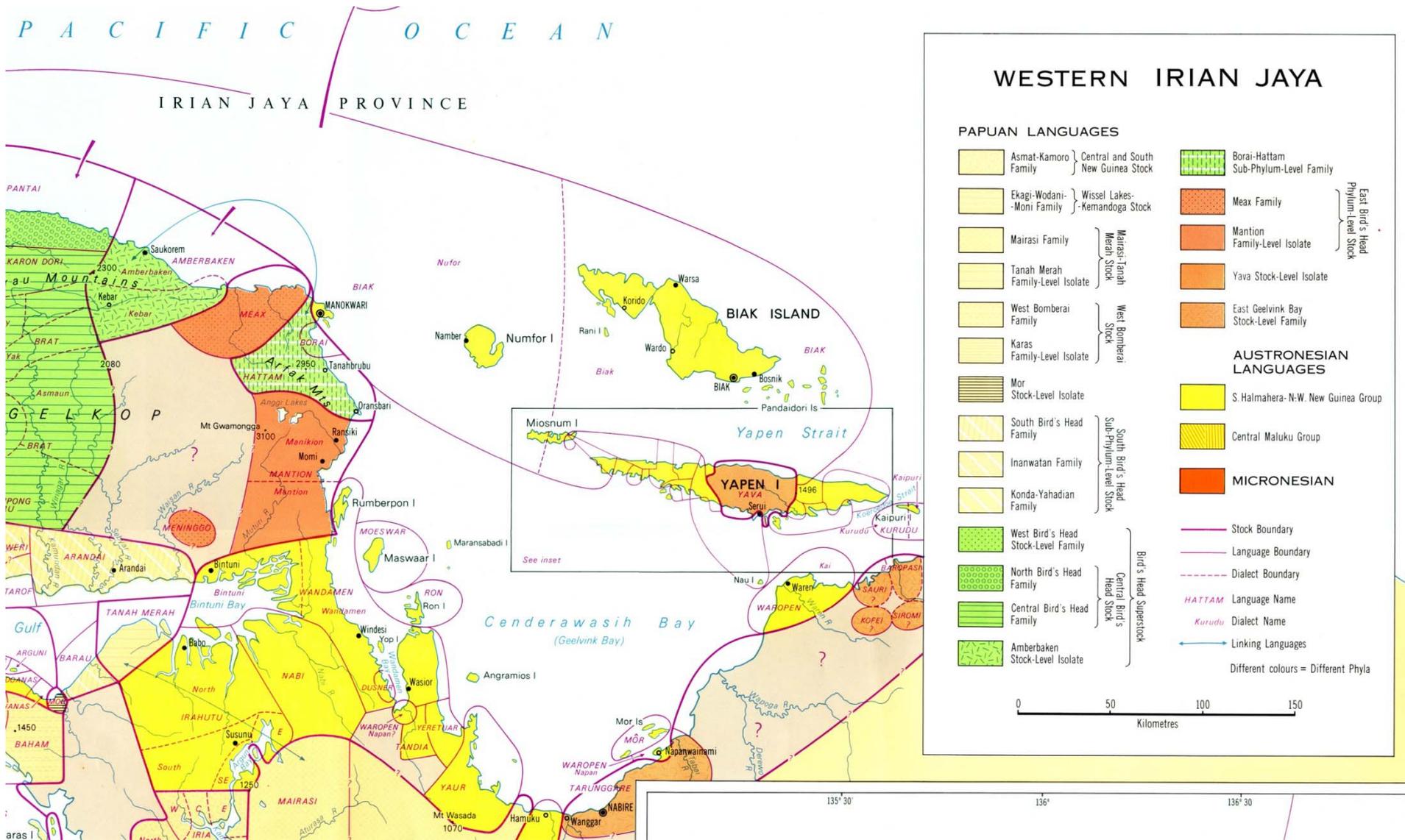
Source: Wurm, SA & S Hattori. 1981. Language Atlas of the Pacific Area – Australian Academy of the Humanities & The Japan Academy, Map 40



Source: Wurm, SA & S Hattori. 1981. Language Atlas of the Pacific Area – Australian Academy of the Humanities & The Japan Academy, Map 45



Source: Wurm, SA & S Hattori. 1981. Language Atlas of the Pacific Area – Australian Academy of the Humanities & The Japan Academy, Map 1



Austronesian languages tend to cluster around coastal areas.

# Non-Austronesian (Papuan) languages in Indonesia

- 498 of Indonesia's 742 languages are members of the Austronesian language family.
- 244 (32.8 %) are classified in the SIL (2001) data as 'non-Austronesian' (or Papuan).
- These languages form a very diverse group mostly located in Papua (210 languages), but are also to be found in Maluku (17) and East Nusa Tenggara (17).
- The existence of the non-Austronesian (Papuan) languages is around one third of all languages in Indonesia. So, we have to give enough and balance interest on those languages to get a complete knowledge of generic geographical features.

# Lexical borrowing (1)

- When two different languages appear to share the same or similar term for something, it may be evidence that the languages are genetically related. The similarity of the term appears because the terms shared a common ancestor.
- However, the existence of similar terms is not proof of the languages being related because it may be the result of one language borrowing it from another. The two languages can be unrelated, but share terms due to borrowing.
- It is common for healthy languages to borrow words from another language. The process of linguistic units being taken in from a foreign language is called linguistic borrowing (Campbell, 1999: 57).

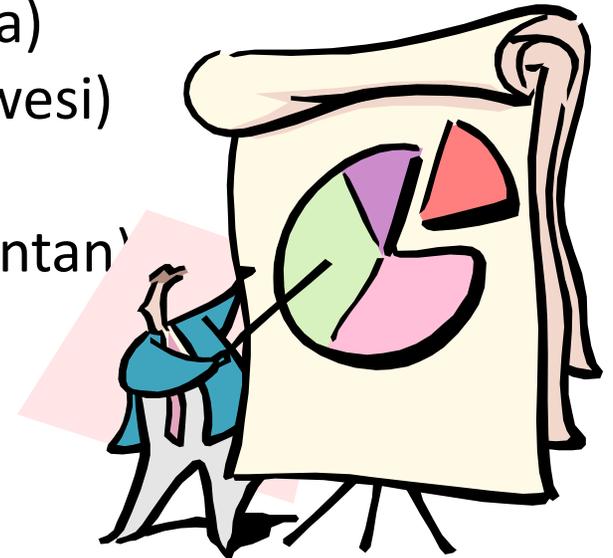
# Lexical borrowing (2)

- There may be significant differences between the way healthy and threatened languages interact when borrowing. We would want to know whether the emergence or loss of a word was simply part of the normal process of language contact or whether it was a sign of 'decline'.
- In a declining language, there should be differences in the extent, range, rate and quality of change. More features should be affected simultaneously and they should appear in more areas of the language, for example in different lexical fields; they should change more rapidly; and they should occur in the direction from the influencing to the borrowing language (Crystal, 2000: 23).

# Language Endangerment

# Language Speakers

- 51% of world languages are in the Asia Pacific region
- Around 12.36% of world languages (742 languages) are in Indonesia
- Number of speakers per language varies greatly:
  - Javanese 75.200.000 speakers (in Jawa)
  - Buginese 3.500.000 speakers (in Sulawesi)
  - Enggano 1000 speakers (in Sumatera)
  - Punan Merah 137 speakers (in Kalimantan)
  - Dusner 6 speakers (in Papua)
  - Kayeli 3 speakers (in Maluku)
  - Hukumina 1 speaker (in Maluku)



# Language Ecology



- Problems of linguistic diversity, language endangerment, language death, and language rights are better understood when studied from an interdisciplinary perspective in ecolinguistics (ecology of language)
- Globalization is both a constructive and destructive phenomenon which is one of a number of key factors causing language shift and language change



# Causes of language loss (1)

- An important question is what factors cause the death of a language? Important phenomena that are involved include
- High physical and virtual mobility means speakers move away from their community and move into contact with speakers of another language. It is thought that mobility will cause around 90% of world languages to become threatened or lost this century (Comrie et al., 2003).
- A trend where less young speakers use the language; over time they make up a smaller proportion of the community; in the end only old people speak it; this break in transmission of the language from the older to younger generation is a major cause of language death (Barreña et al., 2000).

## Causes of language loss (2)

- Population size is a factor; Small population size, it should be said, is not on its own a cause of language loss. There are small populations which, due to their isolation, can remain viable. However, larger population size may be a buffer that creates time for a community to adapt to change and recover from threats.
- Contextual and cultural factors can play a crucial part. For example, attitudes towards the language can be positive or negative.

# The importance of archiving

- Languages with large numbers of speakers (like Javanese and Buginese) are going to be around for some time to come. They are '**living**' languages.
- When a language only has one speaker that person's knowledge of the language is an archive of the group's linguistic past. If the language has never been written down, or recorded on tape, then what is in their mind is all there is. When the last speaker dies, the archive is gone and it is not only '**dead**' but as if the language had never existed at all because it leaves no trace.
- **In between** these two extremes, languages which have few speakers face a more uncertain future. Some may survive, some not.

# How small is too small to survive?

- Common sense tells us that the fewer speakers a language has, the more likely it is to be threatened with extinction. However, the number of speakers is not the only factor; cultural and contextual factors should be taken into account too.
- Crystal (2000: 20) stated that languages would need to have at least 1,000 speakers for them to be classified as '*small but viable*'. A language with only 250 speakers or less is thought to be certain to become extinct.
- Exactly 100 of Indonesia's 742 regional languages have 250 or less speakers; as such, they could be categorized as Endangered, but probably are Seriously Endangered or even Moribund.
- These languages are to be found in Sumatra (1 language), Kalimantan (4), Sulawesi (5), Maluku (13) and Papua (77).



# Classification of the degrees of language endangerment

- The following is based on Stephen Wurm's five level classification which emphasizes endangered languages:
  1. Potentially endangered languages: Languages coming under significant pressure from the majority language and whose speakers form a social and economic minority; the younger generation of speakers have begun to switch to the majority language;
  2. Endangered languages: Languages with no younger generation mother-tongue speakers;
  3. Seriously endangered languages: Languages with speakers above the age of 50;
  4. Moribund languages: Languages whose only speakers are above the age of 70; and
  5. Extinct languages: Languages with no living speakers or languages with only one living speaker.

Source: Wurm 1998, as quoted in Crystal (2000:21)

# What factors cause language death?

- Factors that we should take into account include:
  - **the number of people** who speak the language at home - is it decreasing overall?
  - **the average age of speakers** in the community – is the population ‘graying’?
  - **the young speakers** – are they shifting to majority languages when they leave home?
  - **the language attitudes** – how do the community see themselves and their language?
  - **the impact of threatening factors** – for example emigration, government neglect, exploitation, mixed marriages, cultural discrimination including the assimilation by the dominant group, pressure from the dominant language, discrimination by educational policies or authorities, war or terrorism, natural disasters, and the AIDS virus.
    - (Crystal, 2000:17-18)

# The significance of language loss

- Among the arguments given are:
  - Diversity is beneficial in itself and indeed in strong versions of the argument, essential
  - Languages uniquely encapsulate and interpret human existence. They represent unique ways of living in and seeing the world
  - Languages are repositories of history. Written (or oral) records allow us to trace the important events in the history of a people
  - Languages express identity. A language reflects a community's existence and uniqueness
  - Languages are interesting in themselves. The study of language is the subject matter of linguistics, a branch of human knowledge (Crystal, 2000: 32 ff.)

# What should be done?

- We need to find a way to keep the process of language extinction to a minimum but not all languages can be saved.
- We need to have some sort of priority for which languages are viable and which are not.
- Urgent action is needed to document as richly as possible at least for human knowledge
- Also, needed to document in for our toponymy program specially for the purpose of writing a proper generic geographical names
- These endangered languages are which have no written records.

# Indigenous language writing systems

# Local scripts

- Only a few of the regional languages have developed writing systems; most are oral/pre-literate cultures without scripts
- Traditional writing may be found on a variety of materials:
  - stone inscriptions, metal inscriptions, lontar leaves, nipah leaves, dluwang leaves, bark, buffalo hide, wood, paper and fabric
- In the old days, Malay used an Arabic script known as Jawi

# Case study of local choice of script

- Sometimes, local government may take the initiative without reference to Badan Bahasa.
- An example of this occurred recently in South Sulawesi.
- Local government officials made an agreement with a Korean businessman that involved local support for the business in exchange for the Koreans' help in creating a script for the local language. As a result, the Cia-Cia language in Southeast Sulawesi are now written in the Korean Hangeul script.
- As time goes on, this script becomes embedded in the local society but seems anomalous in the context of the otherwise universal use of the Latin script.

script of  
Central **Java**

ꦲ ꦤ ꦏ ꦫ ꦏꦏ

a n c r k

ꦢ ꦠ ꦱ ꦱꦮ ꦭ

d t s w l

ꦥ ꦢꦲ ꦗ ꦚ ꦚꦺ

p dh j y ny

ꦩ ꦒ ꦏꦧ ꦠꦺ ꦏꦚꦺ

m g b th ng

script of  
**Sunda**

ᮘ a    ᮙ n    ᮛ re

ᮜ b    ᮞ p

ᮟ c    ᮠ r

ᮡ d    ᮣ s

ᮤ g    ᮥ t

ᮦ h    ᮧ w

ᮩ j    ᮭ y

᮪ k    ᮯ dh

᮰ l    ᮳ ng

᮲ m    ᮵ ny

script of **Bali**

ꦲ	a	ꦥ	p
ꦁ	b	ꦫ	r
ꦲꦿ	c	ꦱ	s
ꦢ	d	ꦠ	t
ꦒ	g	ꦮ	w
ꦕ	h	ꦪ	y
ꦗ	j	ꦟ	dh
ꦏ	k	ꦚ	ng
ꦭ	l	ꦞ	ny
ꦩ	m	ꦗ	th
ꦤ	n		

script of  
**Lampung**

ꦲ

a

ꦤ

n

ꦧ

b

ꦥ

p

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c

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script of **Makassar**

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Examples of traditional writing

# Scripts Heritage

- We need to consider how to preserve local scripts
- Encoding will bring a number of advantages
  - preservation of the local language
  - preservation of traditional local knowledge, wisdom, beliefs, skills, technologies (e.g. knowledge about, medicines, the environment, architecture, agriculture)
  - comparative corpus-based diachronic studies of language and culture

# Early stone inscriptions



**The oldest writing in Indonesia is a stone inscription from Kutai dated 350-400 AD. It tells about a ritual animal sacrifice during a Hindu ceremony. Source: *Indonesian Heritage, Vol. 1. Ancient History, page 46***

# Javanese

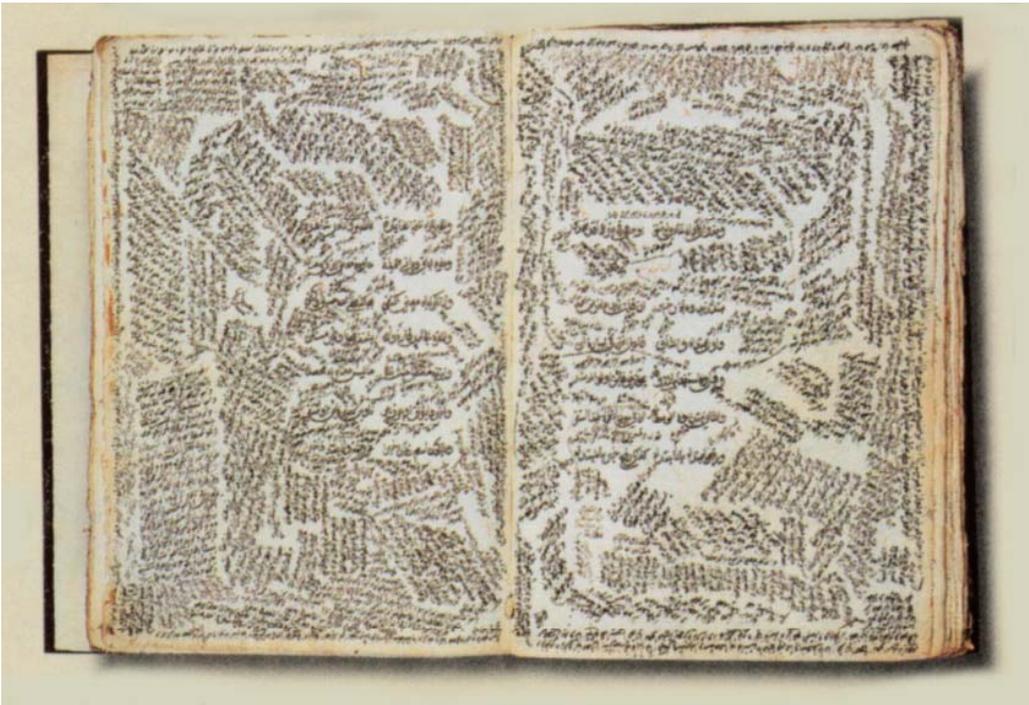


- The Bharatayuddha manuscript by Mpu Sedah & Panuluh, dated 1157

- The Panji Jayakusuma manuscript, circa 1840s from the North Java coast



# Arabic

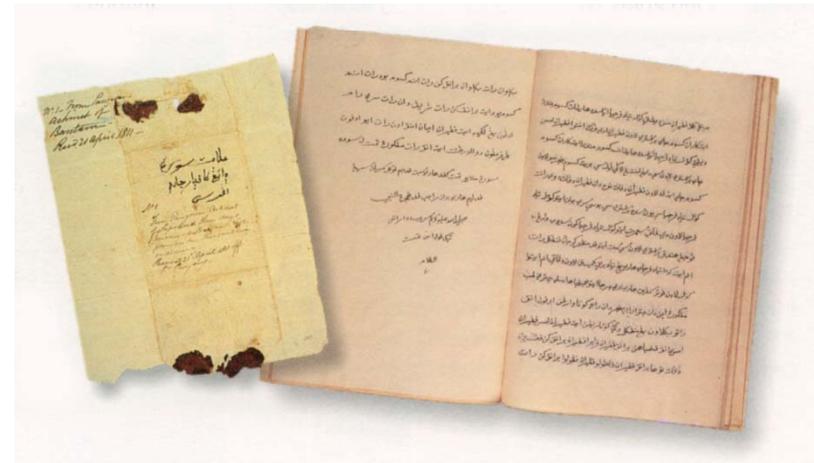
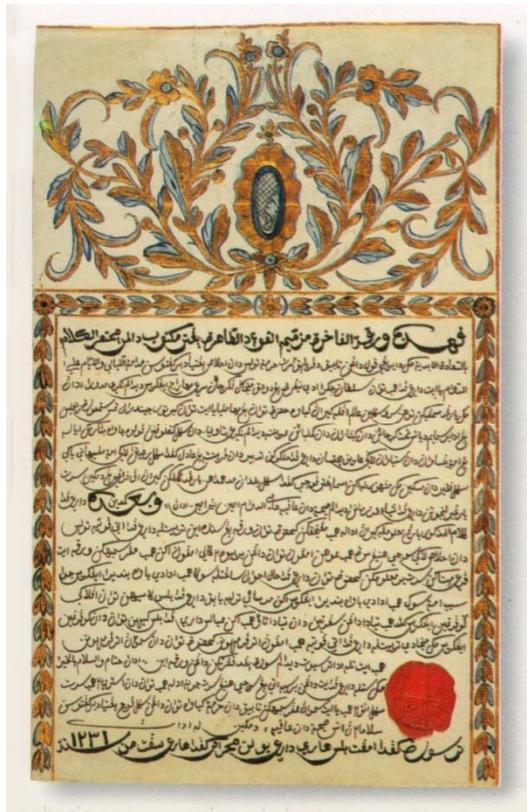


- An Arabic grammar, 12<sup>th</sup> C., with annotations by students in the margins

- A 19<sup>th</sup> C. Qur'an from Aceh



# Malay



- A letter from Cakraningrat (Madura) to Raffles (1816)

- A letter from Prince Ahmad and Prince Anom to the British crown

# Acehnese



The royal seal of Sultan Alauddin Muhammad Daud Syah, 1878

- A book on performing Shalat with notes in Acehnes and Malay



- Hikayat Laksana Diwa, 1918



# Balinese

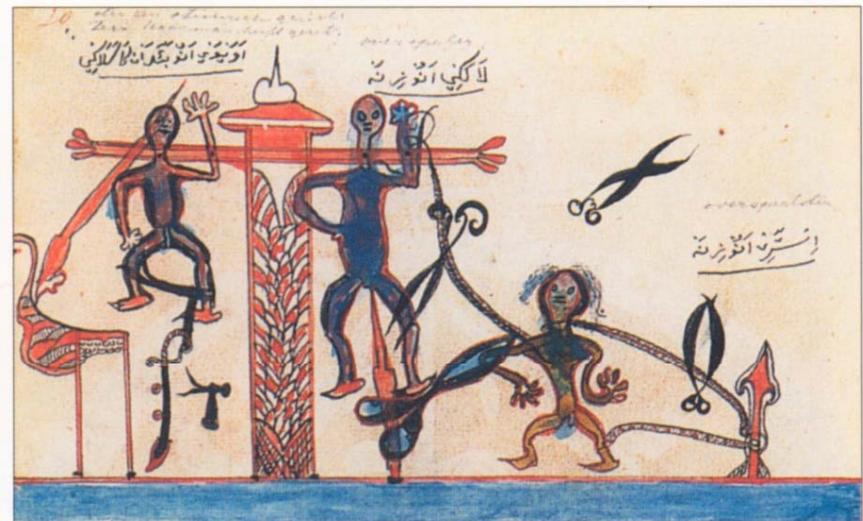


- A manuscript on the Balinese martial arts of Maende or Magebug

# Sundanese



- A history of Banten, 1662



- A treatise on the torments of hell for adulterers

# Lampungese



- The Gelumpai love letter

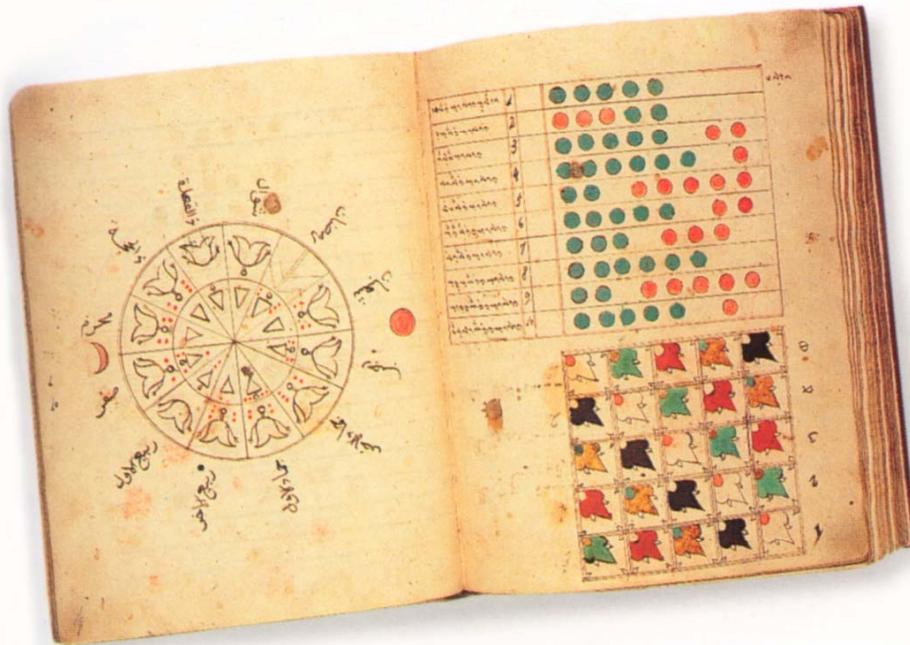
# Batak



- A Batak talisman inscribed on buffalo horn
- Bindu Matoga, a manuscript on protecting oneself from sorcery

# Buginese

- The Kutika manuscript on divining auspicious days

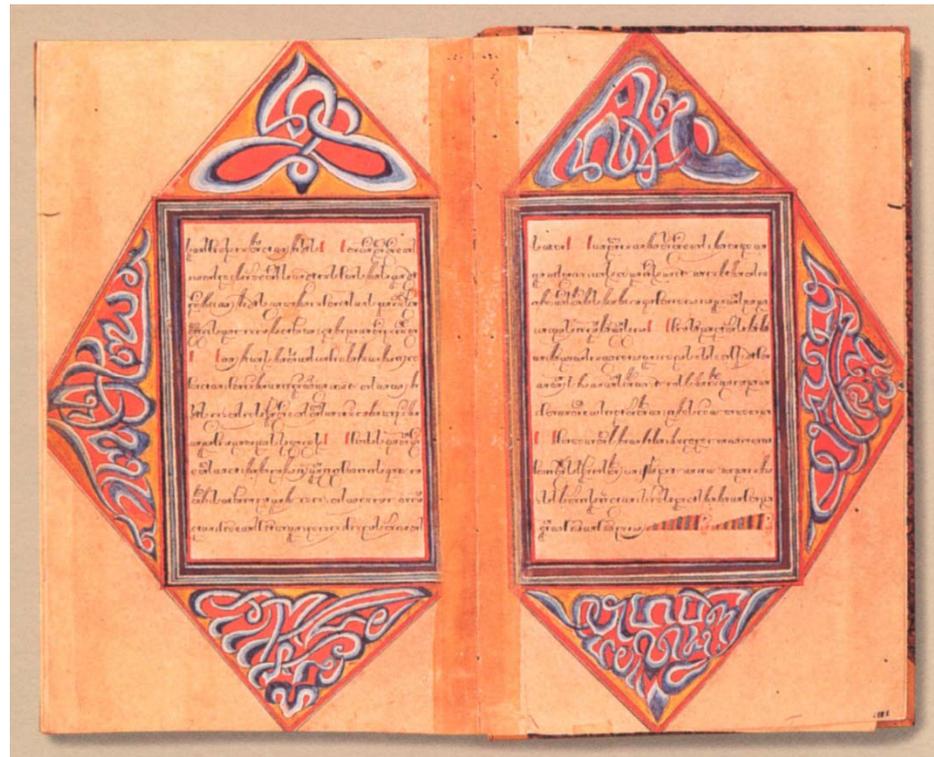


- The La Galigo manuscript on a spool



*Fragment of La Galigo on a long strip of lontar leaves scrolled around an axis.*

# Cirebon (Javanese/Sundanese)



- A 19<sup>th</sup> C. manuscript from Cirebon

# Naming Geographical Features, Maps and Gazetteer

# Naming Geographical Features

- Collecting of names and generic geographical feature names in the field according to local speakers
- Creating standardization of writing and spelling of geographical names for local oral languages, do not impose Indonesian spelling to local languages
- Mastering principles and procedures for geographical naming
- Creating of a national database of geographical names

# Maps

- Maps are a form of publication which contains geographical or manmade features on land or under the sea.
- We can consider the names given to these features to be standardized and used as a reference.
- Therefore, maps containing geographical features of different scales can be used as a secondary reference source after the gazeteer for finding standard names.

# The National Gazetteer (1)

- The National Gazetteer of Geographical Names is a formal list of standardized names which is to be used as the only reference for names and their spelling by the general public, government officials, in business and the mass media in all official and legal documents, textbooks in education and on maps.
- Geographical names especially island names should get special attention because of their role in demarcating the international territorial boundaries of the state, something related to preserving its integrity.

# The National Gazetteer (2)

- Names of natural features, man-made features, and administrative features, should also be treated equally because of their role in efficient administration and good governance. For example:
  - Natural features:
    - mountains, mountain ranges, hills, valleys, forests, seas, straits, rivers, bays, including undersea features
  - Man-made features:
    - housing estates, toll roads, arterial roads, dams, airports, harbors
  - Administrative features:
    - provinces, districts, sub-districts, villages

# The function of the Gazetteer

- The Gazetteer's function and role is central because it is considered to be **the sole reference source** of names
- In particular it is the sole reference for the spelling of names.
- Therefore our knowledge of generic names in regional languages is extremely important.

# Conclusions and recommendations

# Conclusion

- An understanding of the diversity of regional languages in Indonesia is needed to support efforts to standardize of geographical names.
- If we are to decide on the correct spelling for names, we need to have a comprehensive knowledge of the generic names in a wide range of the regional languages.
- In addition, we should identify the meaning and etymology (origins) of specific names used by local people by understanding their history and culture.

# Recommendations

- A basic knowledge in geographical linguistics, local history and a working knowledge of toponymy are needed.
- To ensure that the regulation of naming is obeyed, ideally The Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Departemen Dalam Negeri*) and the Indonesian Geospatial Information Agency (*Badan Informasi Geospasial – BIG*) should work closely with:
  - the Ministry of Trade (*Kementerian Perdagangan*) which authorises company names,
  - Local Government (*Pemerintah Daerah*) which gives permission for public advertising,
  - Advertising Agencies in their use of Indonesian or local languages, and
  - the National Agency for Languages (*Badan Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa*) which regulates the writing of names.