

Lapita canoes and their multi-ethnic crews: might marginal Austronesian languages be non-Austronesian?

The classification of languages as Austronesian is sometimes carried using a rather generous view of cognacy. A few well-known PMP cognates and a perception that an island was uninhabited prior to the Oceanic expansion have often allowed linguists to assign languages to Austronesian without serious historical argument. Blust has drawn attention to Kokota and the Whiteman languages, but this is clearly also a problem for the languages of Vanikoro and Utupua, small islands in the Southern Solomons. These languages show very limited cognacy with proto-Oceanic, and often with irregular correspondences. If they *are* Oceanic, they have certainly developed in ways quite at odds with almost everything we know about diversification in Austronesian. However, there is no archaeological evidence for prior settlement, so this cannot be a situation of language mixture such as may be the case in the Solomons. A possible explanation for this is these languages result from intensive interaction with a variety of NAN languages in the Oceanic homeland, and that the early canoes carrying settlers had crews already representing an ethnic and linguistic mosaic, which was transferred to the new settlements. The paper also considers if a similar model makes sense for other problematic languages in the region.