

# The Right to Say Yes: Language Documentation in West Papua<sup>1</sup>

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This work was supported by the National Science Foundation DEL under Grant 1153795.

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Link to published version: [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07268602.2017.1350131](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07268602.2017.1350131)

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<sup>1</sup>Many thanks to Claire Bown, Marice Karubuy, the CELD staff, Yusuf Sawaki, Eny Arilaha, Cika Tethool, Suriel Mofu, Martin Windesi, Lorensina Biambara, Aukila Karubuy, Yale Council on Southeast Asia Studies, and the Windesi and Sombokoro communities for their generosity and support.

## Abstract

There has been much discussion in the recent literature on language documentation about the ethical considerations faced by linguists conducting fieldwork on endangered languages. This paper discusses the author's experiences conducting fieldwork on the Wamesa language in West Papua, Indonesia under the auspices of a regional language center. The two groups with a stake in this research, the language center and the Wamesa speech community, both determined that their best interest were served by allowing open access to outside researchers and by encouraging wide dissemination of data. Their motivations for taking this view, and therefore the most appropriate ways for a linguist to reciprocate their support, varied greatly: the language center requested training in linguistic best practices, while the speech community felt they were receiving less tangible benefits, drawing on the prestige brought by the presence of an outsider and their attitudes towards language ownership. This account describes another possible model for the community/linguist relationship in which the speakers use their control over research to expand rather than restrict access, and the outcome of acting ethically is significantly different than that described in some other well-publicized field sites.

*Keywords: Linguistic fieldwork, ethics, language ownership, endangered languages.*

## 1. Introduction

Much has been written about different models of collaboration for conducting linguistic fieldwork. The question of how to respect the needs of the speech community while carrying out research is extremely important, and its answer will vary greatly between languages and communities. This paper discusses one linguist's experiences working with one language to highlight the extent of that variation, and reinforce the notion that the actions and modes of working which are most appropriate in one field situation may be utterly inappropriate in another, even when a uniform set of ethical guidelines are followed.

In 2011–2017, I spent a total of approximately eight months in the Indonesian province of West Papua, working primarily on the Windesi dialect of Wamesa [wad], an Austronesian language with about six thousand speakers situated along the south-western coast of Cenderawasih Bay. While there, I had responsibilities to two local groups: the Wamesa speakers with whom I worked in Manokwari, Windesi, Sombokoro, and Bintuni; and the Center for Endangered Languages Documentation (CELD), a locally-run language center

at the Universitas Negeri Papua (UNIPA) in Manokwari, which sponsored my work. While both groups determined that their best interests were served by facilitating open access for researchers and wide dissemination of results, they differed in their perceived gains. By welcoming outside scientists, the CELD was able to tap into their expertise and provide training to its students with the goal of equipping them to carry out their own high-quality documentation projects. The Wamesa speakers, on the other hand, while largely uninterested in the research aspects of the project, are proud of their language and excited to teach it to an outsider and thereby share it with the world, and felt that doing so brought prestige to the Wamesa community.

The scope of this paper is by necessity somewhat limited; it is a case study of one language, not a generalization over many. This is in line with much other work on the topic, including accounts such as Wilkins (1992) and Stebbins (2003) which provide counterpoints to this one. A second type of limitation is found in the sample size of speakers whose views inform this report — I can only speak to the responses of those I personally interacted with, who are by necessity a small percentage of the ~6000 speakers of the language. That said, the attitudes of those I spoke with were quite consistent,<sup>2</sup> varying in their level of engagement far more than in tone, and I believe they can be viewed as representative. Here I use the term *Wamesa community* as a shorthand for the subset of speakers with whom I interacted and whose attitudes I can confidently report, recognizing that the full speech community is in fact far broader.

In many situations (see for example Wilkins 1992, among others), fieldwork is done under the auspices of a language center which controls and restricts the flow of data. Following the same ethical mandate to respect the wishes of the community leads to diametrically opposed courses of action and modes of work when the group in question sees their interests as aligned in the same vein as those of Wamesa speakers rather than, say, the Arrernte community. This should not come as a surprise; as the cultural and political situation in Papua<sup>3</sup> differs

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<sup>2</sup>This holds true even outside of Wamesa. In the summer of 2016 I conducted a lexical survey of other Cenderawasih Bay languages while in Manokwari, and was similarly warmly received by speakers of eight other Austronesian and Papuan varieties. I explicitly discussed this with a college-aged speaker of Biak, who said that he and those he knew were happy to teach Biak to outsiders such as myself, and described with humor a German who came to his home village to learn the language and ended up sounding ‘more Biak than us’. In terms of sharing their language with a broader audience, speakers of all of these languages consented with varying levels of interest to having their recordings turned into online talking dictionaries, and an elderly speaker of Roon became emotional at the prospect of seeing his language alongside prestige varieties such as Indonesian and English on the internet.

<sup>3</sup>A note on terminology: There are two Indonesian provinces on the island of New Guinea: West Papua (formerly West Irian Jaya/*Irian Jaya Barat*), where I work, and Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) to the east. I

greatly from that of North America or Australia, so are speaker expectations naturally quite different from those described by Wilkins and others. In describing my experiences and the expectations of the groups with which I worked, I do not mean to minimize the wishes of others who (rightly) demand a more restrictive paradigm, but to point out that their experiences, as well as mine, are points in a range of possible attitudes. The example presented here provides one more model of how fieldwork may be responsibly carried out under local supervision, one which recognizes that the diversity of the desires of language communities is as broad as the diversity of the languages which they speak.

## 2. Preliminaries: An Ethical Framework

A discussion of the differing outcomes of following an ethical framework cannot proceed without first laying out the framework itself. The points I discuss here are neither novel nor complete, but simply reflect certain basic, generally agreed-upon (i.e. [Rice 2006](#); [Linguistic Society of America 2009](#); [Austin 2013](#)) guidelines that will prove relevant to the remainder of the discussion. There is certainly much left to be discussed and debated as the field moves forward and our goals and methods as linguists evolve. These basic tenets are intended to be more or less universal; their practical implications, however, are not.

Keren Rice perhaps puts it best when she lays out the ‘core responsibilities’ of a linguist: ‘to give as well as to take, to learn as well as to teach, to be a responsible citizen, to show respect for all’ ([Rice 2006](#): 151). Other codes of ethics add somewhat more specificity to the question of what is entailed by responsibility and respect. The [Linguistic Society of America’s \(2009\)](#) Ethics Statement says, with respect to language consultants, that the linguist should ‘respect their rights and wishes’, a mandate which I would expand beyond the individual consultant to also include the relevant speech community.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1. Local Control

As to what those rights entail, there are two points in particular which I will address here. For the first, several professional organizations, including the LSA, the Australian Linguistics Society, and the American Anthropological Association ([Linguistic Society of America 2009](#);

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will follow local convention in using the term *Papua* to refer to the region as a whole, encompassing both provinces; *West Papua Province* to refer specifically to that province; and *Papua Province* to refer to that province in particular.

<sup>4</sup>I will avoid here (as does the LSA itself) the sometimes-thorny issue of determining what exactly the relevant speech community is and who it comprises, while acknowledging that the question can be a difficult one, and that there may be several relevant individuals or groups, sometimes with competing demands and interests, who must be taken into account.

American Anthropological Association 2012; Australian Linguistic Society 1990), as well as individual linguists (Wilkins 1992; Battiste & Henderson 2000; Rice 2006, among others), bring up the right of the speech community to have control over the data collected. This includes its content, its distribution, the extent of access, and its use in research; this may also entail a measure of control over the products of research (dissertations, articles, etc.) and their content and publication. What is most discussed, in the context of control, is the right of a community to say no, to limit access and distribution, to veto the use of certain data in analysis, to decide not to allow research either on certain topics or at all. There are many reasons why a group might decide that it is in their best interest to set out such limitations, including (but certainly not limited to): concern about negative consequences for the community stemming from possible inaccuracies, release of secret or sensitive material, and other problems stemming from a lack of accountability; negative experiences with previous researchers or journalists; an inability of the community to access or benefit from products of research; a history of exploitation; and a desire to allocate limited resources (time, money, etc.) to more immediate, obviously pressing needs rather than to a research project.

What arises less often in such discussions is the right to say yes. In the case of my work in Papua, both the local language center and the Wamesa speakers with whom I interacted decided that their best interest lay in welcoming outside researchers, promoting in-depth data collection, and encouraging its dissemination to the broader world. This response differs importantly from cases where communities offer passive acceptance of a project; while most Wamesa speakers I encountered were uninterested in the details or focus of my research, they encouraged and took pride in the spreading of knowledge about their language. I would suggest that community desires can vary independently along (at least) two axes, one dealing with involvement in the content and direction of research and the other with dissemination of its various results. In the Papuan context, the community response tends toward passive acceptance on the first, with no expressed interest in directing the content or output of my work, but on the second involves not just acceptance but positive, enthusiastic consent for sharing what I've learned with others. The more common situation discussed in the literature, such as that of Wilkins (1992) and Stebbins (2003) (discussed in some detail below), might be characterized as high involvement/control on both axes. Other situations could be imagined with more active interest in but low desire for control of research topic, apathy over dissemination of results, or any other combination of these parameters, resulting in a rich spectrum of views and concomitant ethical pathways.

The motives of my two groups of primary stakeholders for supporting open access to language data differed, just as the potential motivations for limiting access may differ between

groups. Part of the CELD’s mission is to promote and preserve the indigenous languages and cultures of Papua which are disappearing so quickly; welcoming outside linguists is one way of advancing that goal. The Wamesa community is not concerned with language preservation — they do not see their language as endangered or in need of active support, though, at least in coastal areas, the rate of [intergenerational transmission](#) is quite low. Rather, they are extremely proud of their language, and some at least view it as a gift from God which must be shared. The presence of a linguist advances this goal and, in their eyes, lends prestige to the community as a whole. Lacking the same history of systemic abuse and mistrust as, say, Aboriginal groups in Australia or First Nations in Canada, the Wamesa community sees few reasons why they should not promote open research on their language, and several why they should.

## 2.2. Giving Back

The second issue I will focus on here is that of reciprocity. The same researchers and professional organizations cited above all agree on the necessity of compensation of some kind, be it monetary or otherwise. But beyond simply repayment for the hours spent by a speaker in front of a microphone, there is also a sense that we linguists should give back in some larger sense as well. Holton quotes an email from an anonymous correspondent, lamenting that ‘[a]cademics take and take and take but what do they give back? Possibly a dictionary that will gather dust except for the very few that use them’ ([Holton 2009](#): 166).

What speakers expect to gain from their interaction with linguists can vary as broadly as their wishes with regards to the handling of data. [Rice \(2006\)](#), for example, emphasizes tangible contributions: locally-useful language materials, trainings and workshops, even non-linguistic projects such as clearing roads. In my case, a mix of tangible and intangible benefits were expected. For the CELD, it was largely a matter of knowledge, as a means towards local empowerment: while there, I was expected to lead seminars and mentor students, to enable them to conduct their own research. The Wamesa community sought less concrete returns, namely the prestige and bolstering of local pride mentioned above. These are very different demands than the learning materials requested by Wilkins’ and Stebbins’ sponsoring communities, or even the patronage relationship expected of Holton in Pantar, just to the west of Papua.

### 2.3. Previous Accounts: Wilkins, Stebbins, & Holton

Quite a few accounts exist describing the relationships between individual linguists and their host communities, and the demands placed on each by the other. Three sources in particular will be cited here as examples of the kinds of more restrictive fieldwork environments which are [most often described](#) in the literature but contrast with my experiences with Wamesa. The first is that of David [Wilkins \(1992\)](#), who did his dissertation research on Mparntwe Arrernte, a Pama-Nyungan language of Central Australia. Wilkins writes that when he was a student in the early 1980s, fieldworkers in Australia began to find their research greeted with resentment and suspicion by many Aboriginal groups, who associated academics with journalists, writers, and others who ‘might come into a community to collect information and take it away with them to share with the rest of the world’ ([Wilkins 1992: 172](#)), to the detriment of indigenous language owners. Rather than come in with a pre-determined dissertation topic that served his needs but would not necessarily be of any use to the people whose language he studied, Wilkins began by contacting a number of Aboriginal organizations asking whether they could use the help of a linguist in pursuing a previously community-approved topic. He received an invitation from the Yipirinya School in Alice Springs, where he was given a three-month trial period and assigned to work in the employ of the Yipirinya Council, with the explicit expectation from the Council that their payment for Wilkins’ work would ensure his accountability to them. He was initially put in charge of producing educational materials for Arrernte and training new language workers, and expected to learn to speak the language. While no formal contract was ever drawn up, [Wilkins \(1992: 180\)](#) describes his agreement with the Council as follows:

My research work, both inside and outside the field situation, continues only with the consent of the Council and may be terminated by them if they have good reason. They must approve all research methods before they are employed and they must receive and approve all works centrally based on my field research that are intended for publication. Whenever possible, copyright of publications is to rest both with myself and the Council. Moreover the Council is acknowledged as the rightful owner of all tapes and raw field notes which I make when I am in the field; they must be supplied with all originals, or copies, of these materials, and the copies, or originals, that I retain are on permanent loan to me, but may be taken at the behest of the Council. Our agreement requires that my stays of research be of practical use to the school and community on its own terms, but does not require that the publications and other works that I produce as a

linguist serve a similar practical purpose (although ideally they would).

In practice, this agreement gave the Council wide control over Wilkins' work. After his initial stay, the community requested that Wilkins stay on working for them for a total of two additional years to complete several projects, which required that he forfeit his PhD scholarship and extend the course of his degree significantly beyond the usual time. It also meant that they were able to limit what other related research he could do, for example vetoing a trip to another mission to work with other speakers of the same language. Despite these difficulties, he writes that on balance the arrangement was a positive one for him, in that it allowed him access to and legitimacy in a language community that would otherwise be inaccessible, gave him a deeper understanding of the language and its use than would otherwise have been possible, and at the same time ensured that he would be useful to that community, working in a small way against the history of colonialism and disenfranchisement.

In her 2003 book, Tonya Stebbins describes her work creating the Sm'algayax Learners' Dictionary in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada under the auspices of the Ts'msyen Sm'algayax Authority. Over the course of six years working with members of the Tsimshian Nation, Stebbins developed an approach she calls 'community-directed language documentation', which she says 'has the potential to transform the relationship of the community to the wider world' by letting speakers 'regain their sense of control and agency with regard to their language' (Stebbins 2003: 2). This of course presupposes that speakers have lost that sense of control in the first place, a description which seems far more appropriate in places like North America than, say, Papua, where western colonial influence was marginal rather than overwhelming. Stebbins initiated the project as the basis of her PhD dissertation, and arrived in Prince Rupert with a draft compiled from archival sources on the language. From there, Stebbins and her project were both vetted by the community. A year after her initial arrival, the project was approved at the Tsimshian Tribal Council Assembly, a dictionary committee of fluent elders was convened, and Stebbins was hired by the Ts'msyen Sm'algayax Authority as project manager. Stebbins' work involved not just advising the committee and negotiating the conflicts between linguists' and speakers needs in the content and layout of the dictionary, but also undertaking political outreach to speakers across the region in order to obtain more widespread acceptance of the project. Stebbins obtained her PhD after creating a draft version of the dictionary, and then continued on to revise and publish the final five-volume product. Much of this later work was unfunded by the community, with the understanding that the resulting academic publications constituted compensation for Stebbins, forcing her to look elsewhere for a regular salary. Stebbins points out that ceding full control of the project to the Sm'algayax speakers without regard for the demands of her

university had difficult ramifications for her degree progress and later professional obligations, and that the overall project was emotionally and mentally draining for her for many reasons, but contends that the overall positive effects of the project in terms of community empowerment outweighed the drawbacks in this case.

Gary Holton (2009) describes his experiences in two very different field sites, one the island of Pantar in eastern Indonesia, where he worked on the language Western Pantar, and one in central Alaska, where he worked on Tanacross. Both projects involved the creation of a dictionary in collaboration with speakers of the language, but each played out rather differently. In Alaska, the dictionary project was initiated at a grassroots level by a group of participants in the Athabascan Language Development Institute, a summer language workshop, and built through a series of community workshops throughout the region. Over time, however, participation in the project shrunk, and eventually was viewed as an individual project of one of the Tanacross elders, who provided the majority of the accompanying recordings and who is listed as first author on the finished product (Holton 2009: 171). Regardless of this endpoint, broad community consultation at the inception of the project was crucial. It was also important that he was not seen to profit from the project, as that would be viewed as a loss to the Tanacross community. In Pantar, the dictionary was begun by Holton himself at the urging of a single speaker, but quickly grew into an informal collaboration between the many speakers who dropped in to participate in discussions of its content. Holton and his initial Pantar collaborator are the only listed authors on the published version, but actual participation was far broader. The expectations regarding profit were also quite different here from those in Alaska. In Pantar, Holton was expected to profit from the publication of the dictionary, and to redistribute some of those funds back to the village through patronage; his failure to keep a portion of the printing funds for this purpose was seen as a faux pas.

### 3. Language Background and Use

Wamesa, often referred to as Wandamen in the linguistic literature, is an Austronesian language belonging to the South Halmahera–West New Guinea branch of the Eastern Malayo-Polynesian subgroup of Austronesian. It has between five and eight thousand speakers (Henning et al. 1991) in the Indonesian province of West Papua, situated along the south-western shore of Cenderawasih Bay and inland to Bintuni. Wamesa’s closest relatives are those spoken on Yapen Island, including Woi, Ambai, and Serui-Laut. Slightly farther removed are the Biakic languages (Biak, Dusner, Roon, and Meoswar), and others in the Cenderawasih Bay subgroup, such as Moor, Yeresiam, and Waropen (Lewis et al. 2016).

Wamesa has historically been used as a regional lingua franca; Dalrymple & Mofu (2012), for example, report that all three remaining speakers of Dusner are also proficient in Wamesa.

Wamesa has three major dialects: Wandamen, spoken on the Wondama Peninsula and up the coast around Wondama Bay; Windesi, farther to the north; and Bintuni, in the more mountainous inland regions to the west, north of Bintuni Bay. No work has yet been done investigating the differences between the dialects, but they are certainly mutually intelligible. My own limited observations of the former two varieties reveal some lexical differences (for example Windesi *mararea* vs. Wandamen *atuma* ‘child’) and some regular phonological variation (i.e. Windesi /k/ and /w/ for Wandamen /ŋg/ and /gw/). Speakers also report salient differences in intonation contours between the dialects. Wandamen is the best-documented of the three, with a lexicon and book of short conversations published by SIL (Henning et al. 1991; Ramar et al. 1983) and an unpublished sketch grammar (Saggers 1979). For Windesi, my dissertation (?) provides a detailed account of the phonology and morphology, and an on-line talking dictionary is currently in progress at [talkingdictionary.swarthmore.edu/wamesa](http://talkingdictionary.swarthmore.edu/wamesa). Older works produced by Dutch missionaries in the first half of the 20th century (Bink 1891; Cowan 1955; Anceaux 1961, *inter alia*), including a Bible translation (van Balen 1911), generally do not specify dialect,<sup>5</sup> though they differ significantly from modern Windesi.

My work was carried out primarily with speakers of the Windesi dialect. Most of my time was spent in Manokwari, the provincial capital city, with short excursions to Bintuni, Wasior, and two Wamesa-speaking villages 100 miles to the south. Manokwari is outside of the traditional Wamesa area, but as an economic and administrative center it has a diverse population, including Wamesa speakers. West Papua Province is home to approximately 60 languages belonging to seven or more language families, plus (at least) three isolates (Reesink 2002; Lewis et al. 2016). The Wamesa speakers I worked with were all multi-lingual, proficient at the very least in Papuan Malay, the daily language of inter-ethnic communication in urban Papua, in addition to Wamesa. Some speakers also reported facility with Roon and Biak.

In addition to the indigenous languages, Dutch and Indonesian also have a presence in the region. The first Dutch missionary, J. A. van Balen, arrived in Windesi village in 1889, though the primary language of religious instruction was Malay (David Kamholz p.c.). The current generation of Wamesa adults generally do not speak Dutch, though some better-educated members of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations did. [Papuan Malay has been a long-standing lingua franca used for inter-ethnic communication and trade in coastal and urban areas for the last ~130 years \(Kluge 2014: 11\), and continues to serve as the](#)

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<sup>5</sup>Cowan titled his work *Notes on Windesi Grammar*, but this was at the time used as a generic name for the Wamesa language, and his data sources are varied.

default mode of communication particularly in cities. Standard Indonesian is a relatively new import into Papua, appearing only after the incorporation of the region into Indonesia and the beginning of the transmigration program in the last 50 years (Donohue & Sawaki 2007), and it is rarely encountered outside of the national media, which is not readily available outside of the cities. As in much of the rest of the country, most ‘Indonesian’ conversation is conducted using a non-standard basilectal variety, with the number of Papuan Malay vs. standard features varying depending on the level of formality.<sup>6</sup>

Hale discusses a modern paradigm of language loss in which ‘politically dominant languages and cultures simply overwhelm indigenous local languages and cultures, placing them in a condition which can only be described as embattled’ Hale (1992: 1). This accurately describes the situation of Wamesa vis a vis Papuan Malay, which has its roots in the Malay contact varieties from Ambon, Maluku, and Sulawesi, and has been present in coastal Papua at least since the 19th century (Donohue & Sawaki 2007; Paauw 2009). Papuan Malay in its various forms is the lingua franca of the region, and its use is spreading from inter-group communications outside the home to intra-group conversations within the home as many indigenous languages fall out of use. The use of Wamesa is similarly declining, particularly in coastal and urban areas; while the Ethnologue gives Wandamen an EGIDS score of 5 (‘Developing’), my observations suggest that, at least in some areas, it should more accurately be classified as 6b or 7 (‘Threatened’, ‘Shifting’).

In Manokwari I worked with four speakers. One, Marica Karubuy, married a Torajan man from Sulawesi, halfway across the Indonesian archipelago; her children have some passive competence in Wamesa but cannot be considered speakers themselves. A second, Mathias Kandami, similarly uses mostly Malay in the home; his son identifies as Wamesa but does not speak or understand it. The remaining two urban speakers, Marten Windesi and Lorensina Biambara, are married to each other, and use a mixture of Wamesa and Papuan Malay in the home. In Windesi Village, fluent adults conversed in Wamesa and Malay in roughly equal proportions, mixing varieties over the course of a conversation and with frequent inter- and intra-sentential code-switching. Young adults and children, however, spoke only Papuan Malay, with some passive competence in Wamesa. This is the same situation I encountered in the towns of Wasior and Bintuni, both historically Wamesa-speaking. Schooling, governmental functions and all mass media use varieties of Papuan Malay/Indonesian, making that the more ‘useful’ language, and necessary for life outside the village. I was told

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<sup>6</sup>For further discussion on the relationship between Standard Indonesian, Papuan Malay, and the continuum of lects between them, see for example Donohue & Sawaki 2007; Fields 2010; Saragih 2012, and Kluge 2014.

that children in villages farther inland still learn Wamesa as a native language, though I was unable to travel to observe this. Though the [young adult](#) children of Wamesa speakers whom I met all showed interest in their parents' language — two were students in the linguistics department at the state university writing their senior theses (*skripsi*) on aspects of Wamesa; others proudly volunteered the handful of words they knew — none could speak it themselves.

[My consultants in Manokwari were diaspora speakers, living at least part time in a traditionally non-Wamesa area and using primarily Malay outside the home as well as to varying degrees within it. Even within Wamesa territory, in both in the culturally diverse towns of Bintuni and Wasior and in the much more homogeneous villages of Windesi and Sombokoro, the language was commonly intermixed with and replaced by Papuan Malay even when all interlocutors were fluent in Wamesa. Wamesa's function as a heritage language for much of the community may well be a factor in the ways in which their priorities differ from those expressed by many other groups discussed in the literature. That said, two of the four languages to which I compare Wamesa here can also be considered heritage languages, and are in fact even less commonly encountered in their communities' daily lives than Wamesa: Tanacross had roughly 30 speakers in 2009 \(Holton 2009: 165\), and Stebbins \(2003: 52-54\) reports that fluent speakers of Sm'algyax were all aged 50 or above, and primarily over 65; those aged 30-50 were semi-speakers, and the language was not used by children. \(Compare this to Wamesa where middle-aged speakers are fluent bilinguals.\) Mparntwe Arrernte and Western Pantar, by contrast, were still widely used by all age groups at the time that they were written about \(Wilkins 1989: 27; Holton 2014: 24\); in this respect these communities may be less directly comparable to Wamesa.](#)

#### **4. Working in West Papua**

In 2010 I began looking for a language documentation project in Indonesia for my graduate research. David Gil, then at the Max Planck Institute field station in Jakarta, pointed me towards Manokwari as an ideal field site: it had beautiful scenery, a strong local support network, and an abundance of under-documented languages. He put me in touch with Yusuf Sawaki, the founder and director of the Center for Endangered Languages Documentation (CELD) at Universitas Negeri Papua (UNIPA), the state university in Manokwari. After an initial six-week preliminary field trip in the summer of 2011, I received funding from the NSF to return for an additional four months in 2012, with a third trip in early 2014. The data gathered on these trips served as the basis of my dissertation, an analysis of Wamesa phonology and morphology. Longer-term projects such as a full reference grammar, talk-

ing dictionary, annotated texts, and historical reconstruction of the SHWNG subgroup are currently underway, to which end I [have](#) made [two](#) additional field trips so far. All of this research has been carried out with the support and sponsorship of the CELD.

My choice of Wamesa as a language to study was fairly arbitrary, but it turned out to be serendipitous: at the time of my first visit, [Theo and Yesra](#), two undergraduate students in the linguistics department at UNIPA, were finishing up their senior theses on aspects of the language, based on elicitation and recording with their parents. The CELD was able to put me in touch with them and facilitate our initial meetings. [Yesra's](#) father, [Mathias Kandami](#), is a native speaker of the Bintuni dialect and lived a short distance outside of Manokwari, though unfortunately I was only able to record him once. [Theo's](#) mother, [Ibu Marice Karubuy](#), was a speaker of the Windesi dialect, and became my primary language teacher.<sup>7</sup> During my second trip I began working with [Lorensina Biambar](#), a Wandamen speaker who cleans at the university, and her husband [Marten Windesi](#), a Windesi speaker. It also came to light that not only did [Ibu Marice](#) have family in the village of Windesi, but her younger brother is also a respected local official<sup>8</sup> (and a wonderful storyteller). [Ibu Marice](#) was able to take a week off from her job as a primary school teacher in Manokwari to accompany me to Windesi, where I worked with her extended family and a number of friends and neighbors who would congregate in the back yard to discuss village matters and see the visitor (me), or tag along on walks around the area. En route home to Manokwari, we also spent a day in the much smaller village of Sombokoro, [Ibu Marice's](#) mother's hometown, where I interacted with several other neighbors and recorded her elderly uncle, and two nights in the town of Wasior, where I spoke with two further households of speakers. On a visit to the city of Bintuni during my first field trip I was able to record [Amelia Kindewara](#), a speaker of the Bintuni dialect, and discuss my project with several others. In all, seventeen individual speakers appear in my recordings, and many more interacted with me and heard about my documentation of the language.

As I see it, there are therefore two primary groups to whom I bear direct responsibility while conducting my Papuan research: the CELD, who facilitate research, and the speakers of Wamesa, both those in Manokwari and in the villages, whose language it is. The two ethical questions outlined above — what it means to comply with the community's wishes in terms of how research is carried out, and what they want me to give back — must then

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<sup>7</sup>What to call the native speakers we work with is of course another thorny issue ([Rice 2006](#); [Bowern 2008](#)); I tend to use the term *language consultant* in English and *guru bahasa* (language teacher) in Indonesian. [Ibu Marice](#) certainly saw herself as my teacher, and I find the description an apt one for our working relationship.

<sup>8</sup>*kepala desa*.

be asked with regard to each of these two groups individually. In the first case, the answer is the same for both groups: they see it as in their interests to promote research rather than restrict it, to allow free and open access to linguistic data, and to encourage publication and sharing of results. For the second question, the answers are somewhat different: in the case of the CELD, to share knowledge and expertise to build local capacity; in the case of the Wamesa community, to bring social prestige and possible spiritual benefits and to support linguistic pride.

#### 4.1. The CELD

The Center for Endangered Languages Documentation has its roots as a satellite of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology's field station in Jakarta, set up at the urging of Yusuf Sawaki, its longtime director, with the intent to collect naturalistic corpora of Papuan Malay and some other local languages; its first project was on the non-Austronesian Bird's Head language Meyah (David Gil p.c.). Yusuf Sawaki (p.c.) had done some research in the late 1990s on Dani languages of the central highlands, and was frustrated by the lack of resources about these languages available in Papua and the difficulty of repatriating work by prior, in this case American, researchers. He wrote a proposal to found a language center at UNIPA to encourage Papuans themselves to work on the region's languages and to make data on these varieties available locally. In 2009, the CELD was formally established at UNIPA with a DoBeS grant to Yusuf and Nikolaus Himmelmann for the documentation of Woi; funding of the center from 2013 through 2016 came from a second DoBeS grant (Sonja Riesberg p.c.). The CELD's goal is to work to document and preserve the languages of Papua, most of which are to some degree endangered, many highly so. As is generally the case for similar centers,<sup>9</sup> the CELD is locally run, by and for Papuans. Though substantial financial and logistical support have come from outside partners, especially while Yusuf was at the ANU working toward his PhD, its staff, director, and the vast majority of involved students are all from Papua,<sup>10</sup> whether indigenously or because their families migrated there from elsewhere in Indonesia, and Yusuf Sawaki has been the driving force behind its inception, expansion, and continuation (David Gil p.c.).

The CELD's staff has major documentation projects in progress concerning three languages: Woi, an Austronesian language closely related to Wamesa and the subject of Yusuf Sawaki's dissertation; and Iha and Yali, Trans-New Guinea languages spoken in the Bomberai Peninsula and the highlands south of Jayapura, respectively. For their senior projects, lin-

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<sup>9</sup>though c.f. the former MPI field station in Jakarta, which was largely administered by non-Indonesians.

<sup>10</sup>a few students hail from elsewhere in Indonesia and Melanesia.

guistics majors at the university choose a local language to research, and write a thesis on some aspect of it. The center provides support and equipment for these projects and trains students in how best to go about their fieldwork, and many of the languages studied in this way are largely (if not entirely) undocumented otherwise. Finally, the center hosts international researchers, including several such as myself who are engaged in long-term projects in the area.

One important point of contrast is that unlike the language centers with which Stebbins and Wilkins were associated, the CELD is not directly representative of any single language community. While individual community members are employed by the center for their language expertise — Jimi Kiriho for Woi, Kristian Walianggen for Yali, Emanuel Tutuop for Iha — and there is broader community involvement in any given project, these groups are not directly involved in the center and do not directly guide its administration and aims. In this sense, the CELD is more comparable to the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks than to the Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Authority or the Yipirinya Council, and their outlook and motivations may vary accordingly.

A core belief around which the CELD was founded, as described on their website ([www.celd-papua.net](http://www.celd-papua.net)), is the idea that language and culture develop from and encode a worldview and body of knowledge specific to the human experience of the society to which they belong and the environment in which that culture is situated. Preserving these languages and cultures is thus imperative, as the loss of a language entails not just the loss of a treasured piece of world heritage, but also the self esteem and identity of that society.

This outlook, combined with the reality that language shift to Papuan Malay is leading to a rapid decline in speaker numbers for many languages of Papua, provides the motivation for the CELD to welcome and partner with outside researchers and encourage their work in the region: the more bodies actively involved in research, the more chance there is to begin to make a dent in the massive amount of work yet to be done before the languages in question disappear entirely. The center thus works to raise awareness of the plight of these languages through publication of scholarly work, conference presentations, and other outreach, both locally and internationally, to attract support for their mission of documentation. Practically, too, it is easier to attract linguists to work in an environment where the demand to publish, a reality of academic life, can be fulfilled without the need to negotiate hurdles such as those required in Wilkins' and Stebbins' cases, and here the center sees no countervailing reason to impose such hurdles. The end goal of the CELD is to build local capacity to the point that Papuan linguists can work on Papuan languages, carrying out their own high-quality documentation projects, and to support the use and propagation of indigenous languages.

This emphasis on local capacity underlies the center’s four main directions of emphasis in its work: the internal documentation projects mentioned above; the training of UNIPA students in fieldwork techniques; support of teachers, artists, local governments, etc. in the development and use of local language materials; and the creation of sustainable archives of linguistic and anthropological data within the CELD, so that data collected through the center is accessible to the people whom it most concerns. In addition to pursuing their own research in the region, outside linguists sponsored by the CELD contribute their time and expertise towards facilitating the above goals.

The exchange nature of my relationship with the CELD was made explicit from early on in the process. Near the end of my initial preliminary visit, a representative of the center and I each signed a letter of agreement laying out the terms of their sponsorship of my research and the responsibilities of both parties in the context of that sponsorship. This contract was closely modeled on one that had been signed by previous linguists working under the auspices of the CELD. For their part, the center agreed to provide me with working space in their office, access to the campus wifi network (such as it was), advice and sponsorship with regards to obtaining the necessary visas and permits, and a student assistant to help with transcription and translation of my recordings. In return I agreed to use a portion of the budget from my research grant to pay my student assistant a weekly stipend, to provide the necessary equipment (a netbook and headphones) for her to use, and to contribute to the development of the CELD archive by leaving with them a copy of all my recordings, subject to any access restrictions worked out between myself and the speakers with whom I worked.

The terms laid out by the contract, while they described the minimum necessary from each party, fell far short of addressing what came to be the full extent of the exchange relationship. The point of the CELD providing me with a student assistant ([Cika Tethool](#)), and of my hiring her, was not so much to speed up the transcription of my recordings or to provide her with an income, though both of those things did happen, but to set up a situation of mentorship. By working on my recordings, Cika gained facility with transcription and dictionary software (in this case, Elan and Lexique Pro), got practice in the transcription of an unfamiliar language, and, from the content of the recordings, was exposed to various elicitation techniques. She also accompanied me occasionally to elicitation sessions, in which she participated. When she had questions about her own data, gathered for her senior essay on a related language, I could help her work out an answer. Conversely, when I came across things I didn’t understand — a cultural question, a bit of Papuan Malay that didn’t appear in my Indonesian dictionary — I could go to Cika for help. Working together on Wamesa, we each benefited from the other’s expertise in ways that advanced our own research agendas.

My collaboration with Cika is a prime example of the ‘shared knowledge’ approach under which the CELD operates, where information flows in both directions between the staff and students at the center and visiting researchers.<sup>11</sup> Both sides here have something valuable to share with the other. In my case, what I can contribute, and what the center values from me, is technical linguistic expertise: familiarity with the theoretical underpinnings of the field on the one hand, and practical knowledge of fieldwork on the other hand. My affiliation with a major research institution in the US — initially Yale, now Swarthmore — afforded me access to resources not readily available to students at UNIPA: a library with millions of books, reliable fast internet access, conferences less than half a world away and the funding to attend them, available subscriptions to academic journals, generous research grants from the NSF and the university, and the depth and breadth of coursework in the discipline offered there. There are several ways in which I can use the fruits of this educational privilege to benefit the CELD. Most simply, I can help build up their library by bringing books and articles to donate to the center. The more meaningful contribution — and the one which I’ve found most personally satisfying — has been in mentorship and teaching. In addition to Cika, my student assistant, I advised two students who were planning their own investigations into Wamesa with the support of an outside grant to encourage student research. I also led the weekly reading circle, a kind of mini-seminar in which students work their way through a basic linguistics textbook, in this case Bruce Hayes’s (2009) *Introductory Phonology*. The meetings were scheduled and the readings for each week selected by CELD staff; my role was to lead discussion, explain confusing concepts,<sup>12</sup> and guide the group through the relevant exercises, bringing in illustrative data from Indonesian and Wamesa wherever possible. Again, there were benefits here for both parties: the students gained a grounding in basic phonological analysis, while I got experience with off-the-cuff teaching and added a new lexical domain to my Indonesian vocabulary.

Because the CELD is a regional language center, and not directly representative of any single linguistic group, their contributions to my research were not primarily in the form of linguistic data and recordings but rather local knowledge. Some of this was practical: it was through the CELD that I found housing, got my visa and travel permits, and connected with four native speaker consultants. Because of their experience working with the languages of the area, the CELD is a rich source of specialized knowledge on those languages. If I didn’t

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<sup>11</sup>In discussions of reciprocity in fieldwork, it seems to me that linguists often downplay their professional qualifications in accounts of fieldwork. But in cases such as this one where there are large discrepancies in educational opportunity, this sort of technical expertise can be an important contribution on the part of the linguist, if the community is interested.

<sup>12</sup>As the textbook is in English, this entailed translation as much as explication.

know what to make of an aspect of Wamesa or got stuck in my analysis of a challenging data set, there was always someone in the office who could explain to me how that phenomenon worked in Wooi or another closely related language, which often proved very similar to the Wamesa structure. These cases also provided insights into the sorts of things I should look for in my elicitation, which I otherwise might not think to explore. These insights have proven invaluable to my documentation of Wamesa. Their library too is a rich source of data from senior theses and other publications on nearby languages which are not otherwise easily accessible.

In the case of the CELD, the optimal means of reciprocating their generosity in aiding my research agenda were made clear and explicit; our working relationship was predicated on a two-way exchange of knowledge. [Though it was never explicitly framed as such, this makes my relationship with them effectively like any post-doc or research position; I mention this here mainly to contrast with the very different concerns of Wamesa speakers themselves.](#) What the CELD valued was the knowledge I could share, whether by means of teaching or mentoring, by providing otherwise-unavailable written resources (i.e. scholarly books and articles), or by making my data available to students and researchers at the center (with the consent of those I recorded). As the goal of this knowledge-sharing was to build local capacity in linguistics and language documentation, this aspect of the project could be considered to fall under the empowerment model of *research with* rather than simply *on* or *for* (Cameron 1998; Hale & Hinton 2001; Grinevald 2003; Rice 2006; etc). While the project of documenting Wamesa in particular will fall largely to me, hopefully my contributions to the center will help to make it possible for Papuans themselves, who have the largest stake in the survival of Papuan languages, to take the lead in the larger project of documenting the many other threatened languages of the region. And this provides the motivation for the CELD to encourage research by outsiders rather than restricting it: by bringing in linguists from around the world and encouraging publicity around the language situation in Papua, they can contribute both to the end goal of documenting these varieties before they disappear and to the practical aim of training and empowering Papuan students and community members to take part in and ultimately lead this effort — going from fieldwork *on*, *for*, and *with* to fieldwork *by*.

## 4.2. The Wamesa Community

If the CELD serves as gatekeepers to and facilitators of general linguistic research throughout Papua, the speakers of Wamesa are the most direct stakeholders in my research on their language. [The language is their cultural property](#), and it is [therefore](#) to them that my

primary responsibility lies. As mentioned briefly above, the most appropriate way for me to give back to this group is, in large part, far less tangible than what is required by the CELD, but though these obligations are not nearly as measurable and not laid out in a contract, they are no less necessary or valuable.

Some of what I was able to give back to the speakers involved in this project was concrete. This aspect of our relationship [parallels](#) the patronage relationship described by [Holton \(2009\)](#) with regards to his work in Pantar, [the primary difference being the monetary aspects of that relationship](#). Many fieldwork handbooks discuss the need to compensate language consultants for their time either monetarily or otherwise ([Samarin 1967](#): 25–27, [Dimmendaal 2001](#): 58–59, [Bowerman 2008](#): 162–3, [Austin 2010](#): 40), so I worked with the CELD to establish a fair hourly rate, which I offered to all of the native speakers who worked with me. Two speakers (both in Manokwari) accepted the offer, while the others rejected the idea, and instead were compensated more informally, with gifts I’d brought from home (chocolate, Yale t-shirts, a solar-powered lamp, etc.) and things like pastries or candies bought locally and brought to elicitation sessions. Gifts were even more important for my trip to Windesi village, as I was being fed and given a place to stay with no possibility of monetary repayment. Thus in addition to gifts such as Frisbees and crayons for the children and postcards from home to show, I brought with me staple items which normally would require a three-hour motor-canoe ride into town to acquire (and about \$100 worth of gas round trip): coffee, tea, sugar, cigarettes, and betel nuts. After I’d returned to the city, I had my photos of me with my hosts printed out and sent them back to Windesi.

While those candies and teabags were important as gestures of goodwill, and useful for their recipients, the photos were arguably more important, and more for their content than their physical form. The photos I sent back (as well as the many that people took with their cell phone cameras) provided visible evidence that I, an outsider, had come to the village to learn from them and study their language, an act which brings prestige to the village. This prestige arises from two main sources. One, as laid out by [Dobrin \(2008\)](#), comes from the idea of spheres of influence. Under Dobrin’s analysis,<sup>13</sup> one major source of prestige in certain Melanesian societies is that of *relationality*, the state of ‘having numerous interdependent relations with others’ ([Dobrin 2008](#): 307). The farther afield those connections reach — all the way to America, say — the higher the esteem in which they are held. Displaying photos of village members with a foreigner such as myself demonstrates the existence of an unusually long-range, and therefore highly valued, connection. To simplify somewhat, the

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<sup>13</sup>Her work centers around the non-Austronesian Arepesh languages of Papua New Guinea. While the culture is by no means identical to that of the Wamesa, there are some informative commonalities.

perception is that the Wamesa language, and by extension the people who speak it, must have remarkably high worth if I'm willing to travel halfway around the world by plane, ship, and *jonson* (motor canoe) to come study it.

In the same vein as the photos, I also sent copies of my dissertation to Windesi and Sombokoro (and the CELD) once it was complete, and plan to do the same with the (currently in-progress) dictionary. These may well sit unused on a shelf gathering dust — particularly the dissertation, as it not only deals with abstruse issues of linguistic theory, but is also written in English, a language not spoken by anyone in either village. But unlike in the case of the Alaskan correspondent cited by Holton (2009), they have value for the community even so, as what Austin (2010) calls a talisman, a reminder to them and evidence for others that a foreigner came and studied Wamesa, and even saw fit to write a book about it, conferring that prestige upon my hosts.

The second contributing factor has to do with the perception of westerners in Wamesa society.<sup>14</sup> There are two primary elements that contribute to a more positive perception of white western researchers in West Papua than is often expressed by indigenous groups in many parts of the world: a limited history of European colonization, and a view of the Dutch missionaries as enriching the community rather than eroding cultural heritage.

Unlike in, say, Australia or North America, where Europeans have historically often filled the roles of colonizers and oppressors of indigenous groups, Europeans have historically interacted with the Wamesa primarily as missionaries (or missionary-linguists). Though the Dutch were in fact an often-brutal colonizing force in Indonesia for hundreds of years, their physical presence in Papua was minimal and late, particularly outside major cities. In an effort to keep the British and Spanish from their trading grounds to the west, Dutch colonial officials claimed sovereignty over Papua beginning in 1828 by an agreement with the Sultanate of Tidore, but in practice they made only 'the lightest of imprints' for the next 60 or so years (McGibbon 2004: 6). After the Japanese occupation during World War II, the Dutch re-established control of what was then called Netherlands New Guinea and, in an attempt to retain it, expanded their colonial footprint. In 1963, however, the Dutch transferred control of the region to Indonesia under a UN transitional Authority, and in 1969 the Act of Free Choice, a plebiscite widely viewed to have been unduly influenced by the Indonesian military, denied Papuans a path to independence and instead integrated the region into Indonesia. Even before the war, many Papuans' 'first experience of the alienating colonial state was with unsympathetic low-ranking officials' from other parts of the archipelago, employed by

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<sup>14</sup>I don't claim that this characterization is accurate for other groups, or even necessarily other Wamesa villages, as it reflects a rather specific set of experiences and attitudes towards those experiences.

the Dutch administration, and this animus grew during WWII when these same officials served the Japanese occupational force (McGibbon 2004: 9-10). Since 1969 antipathy has only deepened, with Indonesians now seen as an unwelcome colonial force in ways that the former Dutch regency generally is not. This is partly a consequence of the fact that Indonesia has been much more effective at establishing a physical presence in Papua than the Dutch ever were. This is most dramatically evident in the demographic data: Between 1950 and 2004 the region's population nearly tripled from 700,000 to 2,353,000, in part due to an influx of settlers from other parts of Indonesia, including 220,000 new arrivals between 1970 and 2000 under the government's transmigration program and an additional 560,000 unsponsored migrants in the same period; between 1971 and 2000 the proportion of the population made up by settlers went from four percent to over 35 percent overall, and 66 percent in towns and cities (McGibbon 2004: 20-26). The last half century has been marked by a visible Indonesian military presence in Papua, waxing and waning violence from both sides, and religious, political, and economic tensions as Papuans, generally Christians, see themselves under threat of assimilation into majority Muslim Indonesia. While Windesi District has largely escaped the more direct violence experienced in some other areas, speakers there are certainly aware of the broader situation. These historical circumstances have led to a scenario where, unlike European colonial powers elsewhere in the world, the Dutch — and by extension other westerners — are associated with religion and education rather than incursion and oppression, and are rather fondly, nostalgically remembered, particularly in contrast to the current Indonesian regime. Where a white linguist working with an indigenous American or Australian language has centuries of accumulated historical sins and their ramifications to reckon with in establishing a relationship with a community, that history simply does not exist in the same way in West Papua. I can only speculate on the reception that, say, a researcher of Javanese Muslim extraction would receive from a group like the Wamesa; and while my observations of day-to-day inter-group relations in Manokwari and elsewhere would lead me to believe that such a researcher would in fact be welcomed, the underlying cultural dynamics certainly would differ.

Those few Europeans who did arrive in Windesi beginning in the late 19th century were there as missionaries to spread Christianity, a role viewed by this community as unambiguously positive. The Wamesa are devoutly Christian,<sup>15</sup> and hold those who brought their religion to them in extremely high regard. J.A. van Balen, a Dutch missionary who stayed in Windesi village for several years beginning in 1889 (he returned to the Netherlands in

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<sup>15</sup>Though precise denominations vary somewhat, all community members that I met practiced some form of Protestantism; *Ibu Marice* in particular was Pentecostal.

1912 after visiting several groups around Cenderawasih Bay), is particularly revered there: a monument was erected where his house used to stand, the school bears his name, and copies of his bible translation into Wamesa are highly valued. Though his visit was over a hundred years ago, people still bring it up as an important event for the village, referring to it as though it were a much more recent occurrence. This attitude towards the missionaries<sup>16</sup> shapes the perception of other westerners such as myself; my association with the men who are seen to have saved the souls of the community, even if only on the basis of my ethnicity, makes me automatically a prestigious visitor (at least until proven otherwise, as can certainly happen). That identification goes so far as to prompt one respected village leader, [Ibu Marice](#)'s younger brother [Aukila Karubuy](#), to tell me that by coming to Windesi and working on their language, I was 'bringing blessings' (*bawa berkat*) to my hosts. Whereas ([Holton 2009](#): 166) encountered in Alaska 'an established ideology that equates research with taking from the community,' my Wamesa hosts considered the presence of a guest to be in itself enriching, [in part because of the religious associations](#).

Linked to the religious beliefs of the community is the idea of ownership of the language, which has also played a crucial part in discussions of ethics. Part of the reason the Arrernte language center who sponsored [Wilkins's \(1992\)](#) work felt that they should exercise such strong control over his research was their view of their language as a valuable cultural possession which belonged exclusively to them. In the Wamesa worldview as it was described to me, by contrast, there is no such sense of exclusive ownership; the language is considered to be a gift from God, which it would be sinful not to share. In a conversation about the attitude of various groups around the world towards the work of field linguists, one speaker, [Ibu Marice](#), described her reasons for devoting so much time to working with me by saying: 'My principle of language is this: God gave it, we share it. We can't hide what we've received. That's not good. We have to share our knowledge with people.'<sup>17</sup> By sharing their language with me, and encouraging me to share it with the world at large, speakers are fulfilling what some see as a religious obligation. Not only do they have no interest in restricting access to their language, doing so would strongly contravene their beliefs. It is relevant that, again unlike some Australian languages, for example, Wamesa to my knowledge has no secret ritual language or name taboos, and little knowledge which must be restricted to a certain segment of the population. Speakers can therefore be more comfortable with dissemination of other

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<sup>16</sup>Other Dutch missionaries have also passed through the region since van Balen, and SIL-affiliated linguists have much more recently worked with speakers of the Wandamen dialect down the coast.

<sup>17</sup>'*Saya punya prinsip bahasa ini: Tuhan kasih, kita membagi. Tidak boleh sembunyi yang dapat. Tidak bagus. Harus membagi kepintaran buat orang.*'

aspects of their language and culture without the worry that restricted knowledge might also be revealed to inappropriate recipients.<sup>18</sup> While there is a sense of individual ownership of folklore — certain stories may be told only by certain people — they may be told to anyone, and therefore recordings of such stories may be shared, so long as they were recorded by an appropriate storyteller.

Finally, Wamesa speakers see participation in my documentation project as a means to express their pride in their language. I was without exception warmly welcomed by speakers, both those with whom I worked in depth and those whom I met in passing in the villages and in Windesi, Bintuni, Sombokoro, and Wasior. When the subject of my documentation project inevitably came up, it too was consistently received with enthusiasm, usually immediately followed by the speaker trying to teach me a few words. The speakers I interacted with were genuinely proud of their language and excited to teach it to me, and nothing elicited so much delighted laughter in the village as the spectacle of my trying to speak it. Similar support was also given to the idea of my sharing my knowledge of Wamesa with others at home. While the nature of linguistic analysis and academic publication were not necessarily fully grasped, speakers understood that I was writing my dissertation (*skripsi S3*) on the language and would be writing articles and teaching others about it, and encouraged me in doing so. What I found (and this impression was echoed in an email I received from Theodore Henning, who worked extensively with speakers in Wandamen Bay until about 20 years ago) was that people enjoyed speaking the language, and that it served as a signifier of an identity and culture of which they were equally proud. Henning (p.c.) characterized the language as ‘the one overriding unifier for the various clan groups... who call themselves ‘Wandamen’’, and expressed surprise that intergenerational transmission had declined so drastically. I would argue that despite the lack of intergenerational transmission, the language maintains its unifying symbolic value. This surely contributed to the pleasure many speakers seemed to derive from teaching it to me, either through direct elicitation/instruction or through storytelling, an act allowed them to share the language with a wider audience, often including non-fluent children.

During my most recent field trip in the summer of 2016, the last before her unexpected death this fall, I told [Ibu Marice](#) about the Structure of Wamesa class that I had taught at Swarthmore College, and alongside my usual gifts gave her a photo of the class, a thank-you card from the students, and copies of their final projects on the language. Her reaction was

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<sup>18</sup>Speakers may of course still make comments or express opinions on a recording that they consider private or otherwise decide should not be made public; these are then deleted from the sound files or archived with restrictions, according to their wishes.

joyful — she loved the idea that so many young people had devoted serious time and effort to learning about her language, and had reached out to her in response. In our last meeting of that trip she sat down to write a letter in Wamesa back to the students, in which she named them as ‘friends of our language’ who ‘think well of Wamesa’, and concluded, ‘I am happy that Miss Emily taught all of you young people who study about our language’.<sup>19</sup>

It bears mentioning that while speakers were proud of the existence of my project and excited to teach me their language, they showed no interest in guiding the research or becoming collaborators rather than teachers, and as there was no sense among speakers that the language might be endangered, there was no demand for a maintenance or revitalization program. (See also for example [Sato 2009](#); [Guérin & Lacrampe 2010](#); and [Crippen & Robinson 2013](#) for discussion of similar situations.) Though I would have been happy to train consultants to take on these more-involved roles, I did not feel it was my place to push it on those who weren’t interested. This is one major contrast between the goals of the speech community and those of the CELD, where training comprised a major part of my contribution. This aspect of the work therefore remained research *on*, with little prospect at this stage of becoming research *with* or *by*. As both [Crippen & Robinson \(2013\)](#) and [Dobrin \(2008\)](#) point out, this is [not necessarily an](#) unethical mode of working — on the contrary, given the wishes and interest of the speakers themselves, it is the best fit for the circumstances. That said, I do feel that despite the many ways that this relationship makes my work easier, it also robs it of some depth. As previously noted, both Stebbins and Wilkins deem their community-guided methods to be thoroughly worthwhile for them as linguists despite the substantial hurdles those methods created, and [Dwyer \(2006\)](#) points out the long-term inefficiency of [a less-collaborative](#) approach.

### 4.3. Other Stakeholders

There exist of course other stakeholders in the research as well, whose role has not yet been discussed and who have demands of their own to make. My graduate program at Yale required that my research lead to an acceptable dissertation, more or less within the parameters I proposed in my approved prospectus prior to my second field trip, and preferably by the end of my fifth year in the program, when they would cease to fund me. This is related though not identical to the demands of the academic community more broadly — success in the job market, tenure track, and beyond requires peer-reviewed publications which take time and effort to produce, and which in a large part are not of particular interest or even accessible to the Wamesa community (though perhaps more so to the CELD). This second

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<sup>19</sup>*Sanene wesye so Miss Emely tiopanusara kawione so mararia wewe kulia pa mia wura’.*

aspect is increasingly pressing to me as I continue to do fieldwork in my current position as junior faculty, having obtained my PhD in 2014. Both Wilkins and Stebbins cite conflicts between the demands of academia for more abstract publications and those of the community for more immediately useful products, either of which in itself could (and for many people does) constitute a full-time job.<sup>20</sup> This is one area where working with speakers like those of Wamesa makes things considerably easier. The community is making no particular demands on my time and output, which means that there are [no expectations](#) to conflict with and I can continue to devote my publishing energy to clitic-induced stress shift and diachronic SHWNG cluster reduction. The CELD likewise requests no particular types of research products, so long as I spend some of my time working with my students while I'm in town. I do still devote time to products aimed more squarely at Wamesa speakers, for example the talking dictionary, but I am free to balance my work on this with other areas without feeling that I am letting any constituencies down.

Those bodies funding my fieldwork also have a stake in the outcomes, [requirements on how their money can be spent, and demands for particular research products](#), and I am lucky to have traversed that potential minefield without any major conflicts. My first pilot trip to the field was funded by small grants from the Yale Council on Southeast Asia Studies and the Critical Languages Scholarship Alumni Development Fund, whose sole requests were that I do something educational with my summer; [an easy requirement to fulfill](#). It was during this initial trip that I worked out my letter of agreement with the CELD and began to get a sense of what expenses would be required to continue the project, so that when I wrote the budget for the NSF Dissertation Improvement Grant that would fund the rest of my graduate fieldwork I could build in those items, such as wages for a student assistant at UNIPA, that my hosts required. [Having these expenses listed explicitly in my original approved budget meant that they were fully funded with prior approval of the funding agency, so I knew I had the funds to cover them and the NSF had assented to where the money would go. The NSF too demanded no particular output or activities of me other than performing the research roughly as proposed, and this I was straightforwardly able to do.](#)

These grants covered research and travel expenses; my time was paid for by my Yale graduate stipend. Stebbins (2003: 270) says that being partially funded by the Tsimshian Nation was problematic for her, in that it was not sufficient to fully pay for her work on

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<sup>20</sup>This may slowly be changing, in that in some areas a move is being made towards a formal publishing process and more 'tenure credit' being given for the creation of annotated corpora — see for example Thieberger et al. (2015) for a discussion on the state of the field and one implementation proposal. While the discussions taking place in venues such as the Australian Linguistic Society (ALS) and the Australian Research Council are an important step, such a change has yet to take hold in a broad and significant way.

Sm'algyax but still created a sense of obligation that prodded her to spend time on the dictionary project at the expense of other projects and led to resentment on her part. Unlike both Stebbins and Wilkins, I am hosted by a local organization but not employed by one, and therefore am left far freer to apportion my time as I wish. [Because the nature of the CELD is different from that of the Ts'msyeen Sm'algyax Authority and the Yipirinya Council, they were less interested in ensuring particular research products than simply seeing the research done and the data stored in their repositories, and only asked that I spend some time training and mentoring students.](#)

## 5. Conclusions

These four main perceived benefits of hosting a linguist such as myself — marginal material gain, social prestige, possible religious fulfillment, and linguistic pride — provide the motivations for Wamesa speakers to welcome in outside linguists such as myself, and to exercise their control over their language by promoting wide access to data and dissemination of results. Not all of these factors will have applied to every speaker I encountered — some may simply have seen recording with me as an interesting diversion, or an opportunity to interact with a new person — but each was explicitly acknowledged by at least some speakers. [Likewise, the CELD, as an academic center with a mission to promote the documentation and description of the languages of Papua, saw their interest served by encouraging research on and facilitating access to those languages.](#) By following the same widely-accepted ethical guidelines as researchers in other parts of the world, I was led to a set of actions which, while appropriate in the situation in which I found myself, would have been completely inappropriate with certain other speech communities; likewise, some practices called for elsewhere would be unethical here. The difference lies in the expressed wishes, values, and beliefs of the speakers themselves, which in this case were very nearly diametrically opposed to those of many other groups reported on in the literature, such as the Arrernte ([Wilkins 1992](#)), the Tanacross ([Holton 2009](#)), and the Tsimshian Nation ([Stebbins 2003](#)). It is often said ([Grinevald 2003](#); [Bower 2008](#); [Holton 2009](#); [Austin 2013](#)) that it is difficult to generalize across field situations; the cultural and historical context of a given group will determine how they view research on their language and how they wish it to proceed. It is important, therefore, that we not embark on fieldwork with a set notion of how we 'ought' to do things, but rather bear in mind that there will be a vast range of diverse preferences expressed by diverse groups. We must be mindful that what a community actually wants to get from their interactions with us as linguists may differ dramatically from what we expect them to want and what other communities have wanted, and that what works beautifully in one

field situation may be entirely wrong for another. And finally, we must be attentive enough to recognize what a group's actual wishes are, whether a language primer, expanded social networks, or simply to be left alone. The case of Wamesa provides a research paradigm that has proved effective at one location along this spectrum of possibilities, and serves as one more example of the expectations a linguist might encounter in the field, and one effective response to those particular expectations.

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