CHAPTER 7

Landscape in Western Pantar, a Papuan outlier of southern Indonesia*

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This chapter describes the landscape, streamscape, and seascape terminology of Western Pantar, a non-Austronesian ("Papuan") language spoken in the Alor archipelago of eastern Indonesia. In Western Pantar reference to elevations is achieved through named places of habitation rather than through generic landform terms; water bodies are denoted according to their quality rather than their form; and seascape terms reflect a focus on intertidal foraging and minimal use of open sea resources.

1. Introduction

Recent research into the cross-linguistic categorization of landscape reveals striking variation across languages (this volume; Burenhult & Levinson 2008). Landscape presents a continuous surface, and languages discretize that surface in different ways. Crucially, this process of landscape categorization is driven by the human experience of and relationship to the landscape, what Levinson (2008) has called human affordances. Understanding these cross-linguistic differences in categorization is not a simple matter of developing a mapping between landscape ontologies, for the underlying parameters on which the categorization is based may also differ both across and within languages. In the Western Pantar (WP) language, to be discussed in this chapter, some elevation terms focus on size, while others emphasize shape. Even more strikingly, WP terms describing water features forgo any reference to morphology and instead focus on the quality or nature of the liquid itself.

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As I will argue below, landscape classification in WP is driven largely by cultural factors, namely the human experience of the landscape and the cultural construction of that experience. In some cases the evidence for this claim is quite pronounced. A quick glance at the inventory of WP toponyms reveals relatively few names for putatively universal geographic features such as mountain. Instead, place-naming strategy focuses on villages, gardens, rocks, trees, totemic sites, and other locations which are geographically unremarkable but culturally salient. Further, the WP classification of water quality clearly reflects a unique perspective on the utility of water as opposed to its geomorphic force.

In other cases the role of cultural factors is more subtle. Although the WP category of mountain has a similar denotation to its English counterpart, the WP term differs substantially in usage. A seemingly simple question like “What is the name of that mountain?” evokes ambiguous responses in WP because the question mislocates the primary landscape feature as the mountain itself as opposed to a village or garden site which might be located on the slopes of the mountain. Thus, WP provides evidence that even when different landscape ontologies appear to correspond in their literal senses, their connotative senses in everyday language use may be quite different. The study of landscape categorization requires careful, detailed ethno-linguistic documentation. Before proceeding with the description of landscape categorization in WP I provide below some background on the language and its environment.

1.1 Prolegomenon

In describing the landscape of a far-off, little-known place there is always the danger of introducing too much exoticism. Indeed, to a certain extent any foreign place is by definition exotic. But the landscape of Pantar Island is truly out of the ordinary, an outlier in the extremes human habitation. This is not just true when viewed from outside: Pantar is seen as extreme and exotic even within the local regency and province.1 Civil servants express reluctance to take assignments on Pantar, and even ordained clergy assigned to Pantar routinely abandon their posts. More than half of the indigenous population has migrated elsewhere. Residence is often intermittent, with families maintaining households off-island and returning only at key points in the agricultural cycle.

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1. A regency (Indonesian kabupaten) is an administrative subdivision of a province, similar to a county. The Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara is divided into nineteen regencies and one municipal district.
The reasons for this are varied but are ultimately related to the presence of a low volcano which dominates the landscape, giving birth to sulfurous, poisonous creeks. Pantar is an extremely hot and humid place with little rainfall outside a brief torrential monsoon season. As a result there is no surface water other than these sulfur creeks, and subsurface water is similarly contaminated by volcanic brines. There is almost no cash economy and little access to mass communication or transportation. (Pantar is the largest island in Indonesia to lack an airstrip of any kind.) And yet, this situation arises not due to the external influences of war or natural disaster, but due to the inherent qualities of the landscape itself. From the perspective of a WP speaker this landscape is not at all exotic; it is simply home.

1.2 Language

Western Pantar (ISO 639-3 lev) is a non-Austronesian language spoken by about 10,000 people on the western half of the island of Pantar, located at about 8 degrees south latitude and 124 degrees east longitude in the eastern Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur. WP is one of a small group of about 15–20 closely related languages which together form the Alor-Pantar (AP) group, spoken on Pantar and neighboring Alor, as well as on several smaller islands located in the straight between those two islands (see map Figure 1). Together with the three or four non-Austronesian languages of Timor Island, the AP languages are generally assumed to belong to the Trans New Guinea family (Ross 2005); however, the evidence for this is scanty, based on a preliminary examination of pronominal forms. The AP languages may also be related to at least some of

Figure 1. The Alor-Pantar languages, Western Pantar on the far left (based on Grimes et al. 1997). Inset: Location of the Alor-Pantar language area within Indonesia.
the non-Austronesian languages of Timor, forming a Timor-Alor-Pantar group (Klamer et al. 2009). What is clear is that the (T)AP languages show no genetic relatives elsewhere within eastern Indonesia outside New Guinea, located some 1000 km to the northwest. This makes the AP group the most distant Papuan outlier group, entirely surrounded by Austronesian languages.

At least five other non-Austronesian languages are spoken on Pantar: Teiwa, Sar, Kaera, Blagar, and Nedebang. In addition, a single Austronesian language, Alorese (ISO 639-3 aol; known locally as Bahasa Bara 'Baranusa language'), is spoken indigenously on the island, primarily in the town of Baranusa, at the head of the large bay on the north side of the island, as well as on the coast to the west of Baranusa; on Kangge Island, off the west coast; and in the Tanjung Muna area on the northwest coast. Many speakers of WP have at least passive fluency in Alorese, and fluency rates increase with proximity to the Alorese-speaking regions. In addition, all but the youngest WP speakers speak either the local variety of Malay, standard Indonesian, or both.

1.3 Culture and economy

The economy of the island is based around subsistence swidden agriculture. The primary crops are dry-land rice, maize, cassava and sweet potato, with lesser contributions from millet. Fields are allowed to go fallow for three to five years. Then brush is cut and burned prior to planting at the beginning of the rainy season. Coconut palms, a source of cash income in other outlying regions of the Indonesian archipelago, are limited, owing both to a lack of water and to a recent blight, but the lontar palm (palmyra, Borassus flabellifer) is cultivated assiduously, primarily as a source of a fermented beverage known as tua, often consumed in lieu of water.

Hunting of wild pigs and deer remains an important cultural activity but does not provide a significant source of food. On the other hand, animal husbandry, especially the raising of pigs, is a foundation of the local economy and tradition. Pigs are crucial to the annual rice harvest. Rice fields are owned by individual families or descent groups, but agricultural activities of clearing, planting, and harvesting are undertaken by larger work parties. The largest of these may involve as many as fifty adults from more than one clan. Work parties must be fed with a pig; a large work party may require two pigs. As a result, farmers adjust the size of their plantings according to the availability of pigs. Pigs are also necessary for certain ceremonies, including marriages, funerals and house-raisings. The meat of pigs and other animals is only rarely consumed outside of agricultural work parties and ceremonial occasions.
Cash crops play a limited role in the local economy. The most successful of these is the cashew tree (*Anacardium occidentale*), introduced in the mid 1990’s, but low yields, labor-intensive cultivation, and blight discourage development of a local market. Most plantations are limited to a handful of trees producing a cash income of less than US$50 annually. Recent efforts by the local government and outside NGOs have encouraged development of seaweed farming, but the collapse of the international market in 2008 has limited the viability of aquaculture in the region.

Owing to the lack of local employment opportunities, many Pantar residents seek short-term employment in the regency capital of Kalabahi on the neighboring island of Alor. Outside of the three main agricultural seasons (field clearing/burning, planting, and harvesting) as much as half of the adult population of west Pantar may be resident in Kalabahi. Residents also travel to Kalabahi for education. While a secondary school opened in west Pantar in 2006, many residents continue to send the children to Kalabahi for secondary school.

Peripatetic travel to Kalabahi also provides a major source of news and information. Most west Pantar villages do not have electricity and hence have limited access to mass media. Satellite receivers have been installed in some villages, facilitating access to national television broadcasts, but local news is more difficult to obtain. A cellular phone tower was erected in 2007 in Baranusa, within range of some west Pantar villages, but as of July 2008 it was not operational, having suffered storm damage during construction. A shortwave radio at the middle school can sometimes be used to send messages to other islands. The most reliable means of communication with neighboring Alor remains hand-written notes or verbal messages carried by passengers traveling to Kalabahi.

### 1.4 Ecosystem, geography and climate

Pantar falls within the tropical dryland or savanna climatic zone, which is more similar to that of northern Australia than to the rest of Indonesia. Average annual rainfall is approximately 1000 mm, falling almost entirely within the months of January and February. This places Pantar among the most xeric regions in Indonesia. Where undisturbed forest still remains, the primary species is indigenous eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus urophylla*).

Pantar can be divided geographically into two distinct geographic and climatic zones. The eastern portion consists of a peninsula approximately 30 km long and 10 km wide extending to the northwest, dominated by a steeply sloping ridge of mountains 500–700 m in elevation. This region is separated from the western region by lava flows which have created steep canyons and presented a barrier to
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road construction. (To this day, the principal towns in the eastern and western regions are better connected to the regency capital of Kalabahi, on neighboring Alor Island, than they are to each other.)

The western region of Pantar, which is essentially coterminous with the WP language area (see Figure 2), is characterized by a low plain of 100–200 m elevation, extending between an active stratovolcanic complex in the east and a smaller range of hills supporting active volcanic vents to the west. The entire region forms what was once a massive volcanic crater of some 15 km diameter, the southwestern portion of which is now submerged. While the presence of an active volcano is not unusual along the Sunda arc, the hydrologic system associated with Mt. Sirung is unique to the west Pantar region. Sirung is the source of a supersaline, acidic brine which surfaces at several locations across the western portion of the island (Poorter et al. 1989). Most notable are several hot springs, two of which are sources for surface creeks which run a course to the ocean. This brine results in the contamination of the water table, with the result that it is difficult or

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2. In fact, the Sirung brine is highly unusual worldwide, being one of the few natural acidic brines to occur in a subduction zone.
impossible to locate potable water in the region. Outside the brief rainy season, all wells are contaminated either by the volcanic brine or by seawater. As a result west Pantar presents an extremely dry and parched landscape.

1.5 Structure of the chapter

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses toponyms and place-naming strategies, noting the preponderance of exophoric names and the paucity of geographically prominent named features. Section 3 describes elevation terms and shows that even where generic elevation terms exist, they lack the salience associated with less geographically prominent features such as gardens and villages. Section 4 briefly describes the classification of vegetated areas, noting the close correspondence between the terminology in this domain and the degree of human modification of the land. Section 5 describes stream and water terms. Here I show that WP lacks a generic river term or indeed any stream term which emphasizes the morphology or dynamics of water flow. Instead, WP water terms emphasize quality, distinguishing varying degrees of water acidity irrespective of morphology. Section 6 describes seascape terminology. The relative paucity of such terminology is hypothesized to reflect the low cultural saliency of the ocean and its resources. Finally, Section 7 concludes with an areal perspective, demonstrating that at least some typologically unusual features of WP landscape categorization can be found in neighboring Alor-Pantar languages as well.

2. Toponyms

In considering the conceptualization of landscape in WP, the role of toponyms cannot be overlooked. Pantar is a storied landscape; the land is alive with names. Garden plots, trees, rocks, water sources, houses – even pools in the reef have names. The names link these places to history, real or imaged, evidencing a deep relationship between WP speakers and the land they inhabit. Names are often obscure to outsiders unfamiliar with local history but immediately relevant to WP speakers. For example, the name Ta Haila denotes a prominent red sand beach located toward the end of Puntaru Lagoon. The lagoon is remarkable in that it is fringed by beaches of many different colors of sand, reflecting different types of mineralization. A mere 200 m or so in length, the deep red rocks and coarse sand of Ta Haila stand out on the horizon. Ficus trees provide morning shade. But it is not the prominent red color or the inviting shade which are most notable to a WP
speaker. The name *Ta Haila* means literally ‘source of building blocks.’ This name refers directly to an important legend in which a traditional chief’s house, or *kabi*, was erected on this location. A large arrangement of red rocks just above the waterline is said to be the remains of this house. The beach now known as *Ta Haila* is thus the beach from which the building rocks for this house were gathered. The degree of transparency of such toponyms is of course debatable. As a name, *Ta Haila* may serve simply as a waypoint, a tool for conveying information about the landscape. For example, a speaker might instruct someone to feed the male pig which is tied up just inland from *Ta Haila*. Thus instructed, a speaker may walk to *Ta Haila* without consciously recalling the story of the building of the chief’s house there. Yet, upon reflection the association with history is inescapable; every WP speaker knows the story. Even where WP place names do not reach deep into history, they still attest to the connection between WP people and the land. For example, the name of a prominent hill in the northern part of WP territory is *Is Habbang*, literally ‘banyan village.’ The literal meaning of this name derives from the metonymic relationship between the hill and the village which was formerly located at its base. The reference could in theory be disambiguated in context, but there is often no need to do so. The village is the hill, and the hill is the village. What is significant about the hill is that there is a village located nearby. In this sense the name *Is Habbang* also reveals history – a modern history of a village which once existed but is still very much remembered. As we shall see in the following section, this fine attention to history in the naming of places turns out to have great bearing on the landform terminology more generally.

Let us first consider the structure of WP toponyms. Like other proper names in WP, toponyms are almost exclusively binomial, usually consisting of two non-generic parts. In a preliminary survey of 202 toponyms in the vicinity of Puntaru, only six names can be said to be monomorphemic. These are: *Buggu*, *Bakka* and *Mallung*, three gardens near Puntaru; *Wassir*, a large valley to the north of Puntaru; *Gurung*, a small bay at the mouth of a stream; and *Malua*, the old name for Alor Island. Another 74 of these toponyms consist of a monomorphemic or binomial term together with a generic: *habbang* ‘village’ (24 names); *gamma* ‘point’ (6 names); *hoaing* ‘beach’ (5 names); *wee* ‘fishpond’ (4 names); *bi’ang* ‘plain’ (2 names); *halia* ‘water’ (14 names); *bila* ‘ridge, cliff’ (7 names); and *kukka* ‘mountain, island’ (12 names, though see discussion below). The remaining terms are binomial without a generic. Examples are given in Table 1.

It should be emphasized that even those toponyms which do contain generics are often exophoric. For example, *Hauwe Kassing*, literally ‘split rock,’ refers to a beach, not a rock. The name itself evokes a reference to a legend said to have
taken place on that beach. In the legend the protagonist splits a drum in half with a sword, and the drum then turns to stone. The split rock still found on *Hauwe Kassing* is said to be the petrified stone of the legend. In the same vein, *Lallang Habbang*, literally ‘Lallang’s village,’ refers not to a village but to a water well.

An additional level of binomial structure exists in which two toponyms – binomial or not – are recited together in a parallel structure. Parallelism is a pervasive areal feature of the languages of southern Indonesia: a pair of words or phrases having similar phonological, metrical, grammatical and semantic structure is pronounced together under a single intonation contour, often with exophoric reference (Fox 1988; Grimes et al. 1997). While often described as a crucial feature of ritual language, parallelism in WP is common in everyday language, especially the recitation of toponyms. Many WP toponyms are known formally as parallelisms consisting of two binomial toponyms. For example, *Siarang Dai–Aname Dai*, literally ‘multitude divide, people divide,’ referring to the place from which according to legend the various dialects of the Western Pantar language diverged, following settlement of Pantar Island. Often such parallelisms will use an alliterative structure, as in the repetition of the word *dai* in the preceding example, but other structures are possible as well. The name *Mau Kaling–Mua Babar*, literally ‘Mau Kaling sweeps the earth,’ makes poetic use of the near homonymy between *Mau*, a personal name, and *mua* ‘earth.’ This particular name denotes a volcanic erratic boulder of approximately one meter diameter which is located near the bank of a sulfurous creek.

Toponyms in WP may also serve to structure discourse. Names are often memorized in a sequence reflecting a course taken by an historical or mythological figure, as in the following excerpt from a story which tells the origin of a particular dance form known as *Soli-Meli*. This brief excerpt traces a string of ten names from *Towang Kalla* to *Manaung–Beda Gauwang*. Note also that all but one of these names are a parallelism consisting of two names for a single place.

### Table 1. WP binomial toponyms lacking a generic component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toponym</th>
<th>Literal translation</th>
<th>Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bo Lolang</td>
<td>waves follow</td>
<td>village name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di Muggung</td>
<td>throw down thunder</td>
<td>rocky point at south end of Puntaru lagoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauta Haulang</td>
<td>hanging coconuts</td>
<td>garden site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuang Ra War</td>
<td>drum fire shines</td>
<td>cultivated field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si Domma</td>
<td>ornament thick</td>
<td>river valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Yasa</td>
<td>lontar palm fruit bad</td>
<td>water source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta Haila</td>
<td>brick source</td>
<td>Beach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. WP binomial toponyms lacking a generic component*
(1) Excerpt from the Soli-Meli story by Gerson Lau Muri

a. maum bunni me yang dekang Towang Kalla me level garden at return.from.above descend NAME to ‘from the garden over there [they] descended to Towang Kalla’

b. ma dekang Tai Kassi – Bi Dewang yang pi come descend NAME return.from.above descend Bukke – Reng Ara NAME ‘came down to Tai Kassi – Bi Dewang, back down to Bukke – Reng Ara’

c. si Ta Baiyang – Mulli Gawang go NAME ‘went to Ta Baiyang – Mulli Gawang’

d. middang raung Ko Bunni – Bila Wang return.from.below ascend NAME ‘climbed back to Ko Bunni – Bila Wang’

e. pi Lang Suki – Serang Banang descend NAME ‘went to Lang Suki – Serang Banang’

f. tang golang raung ta Dowang Mali – Sela Bunni and.then ascend already NAME ‘then up to Dowang Mali – Sela Bunni’

g. Tobu Mali Wenang – Wenang Gakka Lesi NAME ‘[continue to] Tobu Mali Wenang – Wenang Gakka Lesi’

h. ma Ki Gaiti – Paling Gaiti, Manaung – Beda Gauwang come NAME, NAME ‘came to Ki Gaiti – Paling Gaiti and Manaung – Beda Gauwang’

In this stretch of discourse the toponyms serve as waypoints along a mental journey which is structured with liberal use of spatial reference terms. The narrative begins with the spatial deictic maum ‘at the same level’ and then proceeds to use nine spatial motion verbs, including cislocative yang ‘return from above’ and middang ‘return from below,’ as well as translocative pi ‘descend nearby,’ dekang ‘descend’ and raung ‘ascend.’ The only other verbs in this excerpt are the generic motion verbs ma ‘come’ and si ‘go.’ Binding place names together with spatial terms, such toponymic discourse embeds a human connection into the landscape. The landscape is not merely an abstract collection of features – mountain, hill, river, etc. – but rather a storied place through which humans have passed since the beginning of time. As with the route descriptions recorded by Wassmann (1997) for the Papuan language Yupno, toponymic discourses lack
the two-dimensional precision of a cognitive map, yet they function nonetheless to provide a human structure to the landscape.

3. Elevations

The most common way of referring to raised elevations and convex landforms in WP is with the locational noun *bila*. This term is sometimes translated as ‘ridge’ or even ‘cliff’; however, it is more often found with the third singular possessive prefix as *gabila*, meaning ‘the area uphill of it.’ In this usage, *gabila* contrasts with *galawang* ‘the area downhill of it.’ This is illustrated graphically in Figure 3 with the noun *yattu* ‘tree.’

The term *bila* thus refers more generally to any upland or upslope area, not necessarily a convex form. This term is common in toponyms, both those referring to large peaks, such as *Was Bila* ‘sun ridge’ (907 m) and *Pu Bila* ‘eucalyptus ridge’ (676 m), which dominate the western part of Pantar Island, as well as low lying areas such as *Boling Bila* ‘least valued moko drum ridge’ (25 m). Many secondary elevation terms in WP are based on metaphorical extensions. For example, *mugang* may refer to a ridge which protrudes out into a valley, but it also denotes the bump on the head of a chicken or other bird.

Some Pantar elevation terms have primary senses which refer not to elevation but to the shape of the land. Consider the term *harang* ‘upland,’ which contrasts with *bi’ang* ‘flat, plain.’ The distinction between these terms is one of aspect rather than elevation. The term *bi’ang* may refer to flat areas regardless of elevation. Thus, the toponym *Diddi Bi’ang* refers to the large outwash plain behind *Diddi* beach. This plain is actually located within a large valley only barely above sea level and hence lower in elevation than the surrounding ridges. But *bi’ang* may also refer to raised plains such as *Dalawang Bi’ang*, a large flat area

![Figure 3. Locational nouns.](image-url)
on a ridge of approximately 100 m elevation located 5 km inland from Didi. In contrast, harang refers to steeply sloping areas such as the slopes of mountains. Unlike bi’ang, the term harang does not occur in toponyms. However, it does occur in the designation harang wala ‘upland people.’ In this usage it may contrast with bi’ang wala ‘plains people (farmers),’ or – more often – with bara wala ‘people of Baranusa, coastal people.’ In this latter sense harang wala has the connotation of ‘Christian’ as opposed to ‘Muslim,’ inferred from the geographic distribution of those two groups on the island. In any case, harang is perhaps better glossed as ‘sloping.’

The WP elevation term which comes closest to the sense of English ‘mountain’ is the word kukka. This term refers both to large mountain massifs as well as to islands. (Islands may also be referred to as ir buka, a compound formed from ir ‘state, condition’ and buka ‘trunk.’) The term kukka occurs most commonly as an optional component in toponyms, particularly in island names such as Uddu Kukka ‘Tereweng Island’ (literally ‘ashes island’) or Gale Awa Kukka ‘Pantar Island’ (literally ‘living form island,’ and the likely source of the colonial era term Galiyao for Pantar Island). It may be that ‘island’ is the primary sense of this term, as it is found only in the more recent of those toponyms referring to mountains. For example, the major volcano on Pantar is commonly referred to today as Sirung Kukka, an apparent calque of the Malay name Gunung Sirung (English: Mt. Sirung). However, the older name for this feature is Saré Buri Ara, literally ‘large torch (?)’ without the generic kukka. In any case only a handful of large peaks on Pantar may be referred to as kukka. Most smaller convex landforms are identified not by a generic term at all but rather by a toponym. Usually this is the same toponym used to denote a co-located current or former village site. Thus, as we saw in Section 2 above, Is Habbang may refer either to an historic village or to the small flat hill (elevation 340 m) near which that village was located, or to both. The generic kukka may be used to distinguish the landform itself from the village, as in Is Habbang Kukka, but such usage has the feeling of a neologism, a deliberate invention for a perceived need to disambiguate between village and landform.

The generic kukka also occurs in the compound kukka haila meaning ‘base, foot of mountain.’ The term haila ‘main part’ is not strictly speaking a landscape term but rather forms a variety of compounds, not all of them referring to landscape. Compare: yattu haila ‘area underneath a tree’; ber haila ‘main point, topic’ (ber ‘words’); tawasing haila ‘incisor’ (tawasing ‘tooth’); tawar haila ‘molar’ (tawar ‘chin’); tauwe haila ‘base of ear’ (tauwe ‘ear’).

3. The identification of Galiyao as referring to Pantar is established by Barnes (1982) and Dietrich (1984). Additional folk etymologies can be found in those sources.
While the generic elevation term *kukka* is sometimes found in toponyms, this usage is innovative and is largely restricted to citation forms. And even in citation forms the use of the generic *kukka* seems to serve to create binomial names from monomial ones. For example, the name *Bo Yali* is already a binominal form without the generic *kukka*, and hence the addition of *kukka* to form *Bo Yali Kukka* (?) seems strange. In contrast, the name *De Kukka* would fail to be binomial without the generic *kukka* included and hence seems more acceptable, at least in citation form. Nevertheless, in text *kukka* is used only as a generic. For example,

(2)  
\[
\text{kukka si tar gaddi ba raung}
\text{moutain this what do conj climb}
\text{a-baulang a-hinna-b hang ha-lama}
\text{asp-fall asp-die-conj 2sg 2sg-go}
\text{you will fall to your death if you climb up that mountain}
\]

In contrast, proper names of mountains occur in text without *kukka*.

(3)  
\[
\text{ging Was Bila tang a-raung}
\text{3pl name on asp-climb}
\text{they will climb (onto) Was Bila (Mt. Basangloi, ‘sun cliff’)}
\]

More typically elevations are referred to metonymically by the name of a nearby location associated with the elevated location. This location may have a much greater salience than any of the associated elevations.

To say that WP has a generic elevation term *kukka* meaning roughly ‘mountain, island’ is not the same as saying that this term is used in the same context as the English term ‘mountain.’ This point can be illustrated with a brief anecdote from my field work in Pantar.

Over the many months I have spent in Puntaru I have spent many evenings sitting on the beach as the evening sun sets, contemplating the view shown in Figure 4. Often I would inquire casually as to the names of what I took to be two prominent peaks. Rising to a height of 1344 m and 938 m, these are by far the highest elevations on Pantar Island, and at a distance of a mere 8 km from Puntaru, these peaks dominate the landscape. Yet, there is much ambiguity and disagreement as to the precise name for these peaks. Most speakers use the binominal parallel term *Tua Pakki – Bodda Bali*, a term which follows a typical WP naming practice by combining names for two localities in a compound in order to denote a region surrounding those localities. It seemed only natural, to me, to assume that *Tua Pakki* referred to one peak and *Bodda Bali* to the other. But none of my WP speaking consultants accepted this simplification. Most felt that the name *Tua Pakki – Bodda Bali* refers not to either peak but to the entire region, including both peaks and the wide saddle between them. Others felt that the name referred
only to the saddle region. Some speakers used *Tua Pakki* to refer to only the taller of the two peaks, but this was acknowledged to be a clipping, a common practice with parallelisms.

It was some months before I learned that the names *Tua Pakki* and *Bodda Bali* referred not to elevations but rather to localities (former settlements, now just garden houses) located in the wide saddle between the two peaks. This was not an example of hidden or obscure knowledge; everyone acknowledged it to be true. It was just considered too obvious to be immediately notable. In contrast, there was much less agreement regarding the names for the two peaks. After much consultation I settled on *De* and *Bo Yali* as consensus names, though there remain speakers who disagree. The fact that I arrived at consensus names for the two peaks only after much discussion and debate is not evidence of lack of local knowledge of the landscape, but rather of my own efforts to impose an etic distinction between the mountain and the village—a distinction which is not very salient in WP. In other words, where I saw a landscape, WP speakers saw a living, embodied place.

The WP approach to convex landforms contrasts sharply to the situation with other landforms. For example, the roughly 400 hectare area directly south of Puntaru lying between the two sulfurous creeks of *Masi Salamang* and *Masi Ke Baddang* contains over twenty named gardens, the names and locations of which are undisputed by all speakers, in spite of their lower geographic salience as compared to the high peaks to the south. For WP speakers it is cultural salience which matters, not geographic salience. Gardens and their location are important to the day-to-day activities of WP speakers; mountain peaks are not. With this in mind I take a brief excursion to discuss the WP terms for vegetated areas.

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**Figure 4.** Image looking south from Puntaru village to the mountain peaks on southern Pantar.
4. Vegetated areas

In spite of the small population size, the landscape of Pantar is intensely utilized by humans. The thin volcanic soils are quickly drained of nutrients, with the result that the shifting cultivation systems require that fields lay fallow for several years between planting. Hence, the total amount of agricultural land may be as much as five times as large as the amount of land under cultivation in any one year. Virgin forests are found only in the highest reaches and steepest slopes of mountains, and even these areas may be used for (selective) timber harvesting. Vegetated areas can be referred to as either alá ‘grass, grassland, overgrown area’ or wappang ‘forest’. The contrast between these two terms can be seen in their relative temporality. The vegetation in alá grows thick during the rainy season, but can be cut back and eventually dies in the dry season, at which time it is easily burned. In the areas known as wappang the vegetation is more permanent. It must be cut in order to be cleared, not just burned. Still, there is quite a bit of semantic overlap between the two terms. Thus, alá me, lit. ‘at the grass’, may also refer to forest, perhaps by analogy with the term alá gaume ‘interior’, lit. ‘within the grass’. Conversely, wappang sassa, lit. ‘smashed forest’, refers to a brushy undergrowth or thicket. Crucially, wappang sassa refers only to brushy areas which have not (recently) been used for gardens, whereas alá me may refer to recent growth in an area which has been recently cultivated.

A more wild forest may be referred to as mutta ‘jungle’ (Malay ‘rimba’), a term which implies virgin or original forest. On the other hand, a cultivated field is referred to as bi’ang (also meaning ‘plain’, see above) or more completely bi’ang atera, lit. ‘arranged field’. This term is distinct from bunni ‘garden’, which implies active cultivation. That is, bunni focuses on human interaction, whereas bi’ang focuses on physiography.

The generic terms alá and wappang exclude certain floras which are considered as distinct from these types. While many different species of grasses may be denoted by the generic alá ‘grass’, the plants known as sabia, bittung, bimmali, and kumbabba are all types of mali ‘bamboo’ but not types of alá. Similarly, hasi ‘alang-alang grass’ (Imperata cylindrica), which is used as a roofing material, is not alá. Thus, the term alá is at least in part defined by the way in which humans interact with it.

It is thus possible to classify WP vegetation terms according to the degree of human modification. The terms in Table 2 are organized roughly from virgin forest to active crop.
This scale reveals that WP terms denoting vegetated areas are conceived in terms of human affordances. WP economy is based upon subsistence agriculture; the most relevant feature of a vegetated area is the way in which it has been modified for agricultural use.

5. Streams and water

WP presents an unusual system for classifying streamscapes and water. In many languages streamscapes are characterized in terms of their morphology, rather than their contents. That is, rivers may be classified according to size or rate of flow, but the contents are generally irrelevant to this classification. Some languages do distinguish dry or intermittent watercourses with distinct lexemes, but in these cases it is the presence or absence of water which is crucial, not the quality of the water. WP takes exactly the opposite approach to the classification of water and water features, choosing to focus on the quality of the substance itself rather than its morphology.

In WP potable water from any source other than the ocean is denoted by the term *halia*. The term *halia* may be extended to cover a wide range of meanings, including ‘water’, ‘spring’, ‘water well’, ‘lake’, and ‘lagoon’. The water in question may be either fresh or brackish, hot or cold. A well may be optionally distinguished by using the modifier *gaiti ‘eye’*; thus *halia gaiti ‘water source’*. Similarly, a hot water source or hot-spring may be distinguished with the modifier *sosoli ‘hot’*, while brackish water may be distinguished with the modifier *magge ‘brackish’* or *makara ‘salty’*. There are no terms which distinguish such water features based on shape or flow. Thus, the lagoon at the mouth of the Wassir Valley is known as *Halia Bakurang* and the hot spring which bubbles out from the beach at low tide south of Puntaru is known as *Halia Kabbarung*, literally ‘water-jar water’. Both are known generically as *halia*. Further, to fetch water is *halia kaising* and to drink water is *halia ba’ai*. Water is water.
The term *haliya* excludes seawater, which is distinguished as *tawá*. Seawater is not a type of water but rather a different substance altogether. To describe fetching water from a well or spring one says *haliya kaising*, whereas to fetch water from the sea is *tawá kaising*. More significantly, the term *haliya* also excludes certain types of water which are deemed non-potable due to the presence of acid brine. Two types of brine are distinguished in the lexicon: *masi* and *matá*.

Though neither is potable, *masi* and *matá* can be distinguished in terms of corrosiveness. The term *masi* refers to an acidic supersaline brine which is highly corrosive and will cause clothing and woven items to quickly disintegrate. Contact with the skin causes a mild to severe chemical burn (a property which may be used beneficially as a treatment for tropical ulcers). The term *matá* refers to a supersaline brine which is less acidic and can be used for washing though not for drinking. The distinction between these two types of brine is made clear in the names for three sulfur creeks which flow across the landscape of west Pantar. The utter lack of other surface flowing water features in west Pantar lends these three streams a certain prominence in WP geography. Originating in natural springs, the flow volume of these streams is relatively small, perhaps less than 2–3 cubic meters per second. Except when briefly augmented by rainfall, the volume remains constant both across time and along the length of the stream, since no other water courses feed these creeks. The precipitating salts are clearly visible in the satellite image where these creeks enter the ocean (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Google Earth satellite image showing locations of *masi* (top and center) and *matá* (bottom). The length of the longest *masi* (top) is approximately 6 km from its source to the coast.
While at first glance these streams appear to carry water, closer inspection reveals their contents to be something else. One first notices the complete absence of vegetation along the banks of the streams; a dead zone extends 1–3 m on either side of the streams. The banks of the creeks are heavily mineralized with sulfur precipitates, and a faint odor of hydrogen sulfide gas emanates from the liquid. The residents of west Pantar generally tolerate a high level of brine and saltwater contamination in their drinking and cooking water, but no one in Pantar drinks the water from these creeks. Only halia is deemed potable.

The presence of four distinct WP lexemes which translate as types of ‘water’ reflects the WP focus on quality of the substance rather than morphological characteristics. Further evidence for the lesser importance of morphology comes from naming practices. While the continuity of the sulfur streams is clearly recognized, each is designated by several different toponyms. For example, the middle masi in Figure 5, which flows for some 4 km from its northern source to the coast, is denoted by at least three distinct toponyms. At its source, it is known as Masi Hauwang Ara, lit. ‘big and far sulfur creek.’ Along the middle of its course it is known as Masi Ke Baddang, lit. ‘crow sulfur creek.’ And at its mouth, where it reaches the ocean, it is known as Masi Kepasali (literal meaning obscure). The reason for these distinctions becomes quite obvious when one considers the types of landforms to which these names refer. The area known as Masi Hauwang Ara is an area of bubbling hot springs and seeps with heavy mineralization deposits, covering approximately 2.5 ha. In contrast, the place known as Masi Kepasali consists of a steep-walled canyon where the creek meets the sea. In terms of human affordance, these are very different places. The former can be easily traversed on foot; the latter presents a difficult barrier to travel.

In other words, masi and matá are not generic streamscape categories but rather names for different qualities of water. Streamscape toponyms in WP refer not to stream courses but to specific locales along these stream courses. The notion of “watercourse” which would distinguish these two streams is simply not present in WP. In principle it would be possible to refer to each of these watercourses with the generic salu ‘valley’ or with a descriptive term masi salili ‘masi flows’ or matá salili ‘matá flows,’ but I have never heard such terms used to refer to masi or matá. The term is reserved for dry valleys which lack permanent streams (though they may contain water wells), and the term salili occurs only

4. The phenomenon of naming specific parts of a water course based on unique properties of that specific area may be more widespread. In Tanana Athabaskan, spoken in interior Alaska, at least eight streams have two or more names each in different locations along the stream. For example, the Chatanika River is known as Nonilen No’ ‘current-flows-across river,’ Dradlayi Niká ‘round whitefish creek,’ and Tthato’ Toya No’ ‘straight-stretch-under-rocks river.’
in the phrase *halia salili*, which describes large bodies of flowing freshwater (not *masi* or *matá*).

To a certain extent the distinction between *halia, masi* and *matá* can be taken to reflect a kind of environmental reality. The WP region is characterized by a lack of water: there are no permanent flowing sources of fresh water. Water is found only in a number of hot springs and in subsurface aquifers fed by these springs, all of which are contaminated to a greater or lesser degree with sulfurous brine. But while the scarcity of water and the presence of acidic brine may be environmental facts, the choice to focus on water quality rather than on streamscape morphology is essentially a linguistic one. The WP language distinguishes water from non-water liquids based on their usefulness to humans. *Halía* can be consumed; *matá* can be used for washing; and *masi* must be avoided. No basic WP terms distinguish flowing water from that in a static body or found in a well. In WP the quality of a liquid dominates its form.

6. **Seascape**

Before discussing WP seascape terminology we pause to examine the role of the sea in WP culture. Pantar is a small island. The western part of the island has a coastline of approximately 75 km, compared with an area of approximately 350 km². No point in this region is more than a couple of hours walk from the ocean. However, WP culture remains essentially a farming economy (see Introduction), with almost no utilization of sea resources beyond the coastal reef. While many WP villages are today situated on the coast, including (clockwise from the east) Beang, Alimake, Koliabang, Puntaru, Boloang, Wolu, Nadda, Tulai, and Beangonong, these coastal villages are all recent settlements, reflecting for the most part migrations in the early 1950s. A Dutch military survey in 1910 reported that the southwestern coastal parts of the island were completely uninhabited (Anonymous 1914:90). Each of these coastal settlements is composed of groups of clans, each of whom still to this day identifies with an “old village” located in the interior of the island. Some of these old villages are still used for traditional ceremonies and for gardening, while others are essentially abandoned. In this sense WP coastal communities remain inward-looking, focused on the interior of the island rather than on the inshore resources. Moreover, the major WP settlements – Kakamauta, Aramaba, and Kalondama – remain inland.

That is not to say that WP territory did not traditionally include the coastal regions. On the contrary, long-term use of the coastal regions is attested to by oral history, toponyms, origin myths, and an elaborate terminology for coastal,
intertidal, and pelagic biotic forms. However, WP speakers never developed or adopted a seafaring technology. The village of Puntaru, located adjacent to a reef which forms a natural harbor, has only a handful of dugout canoes, all of questionable seaworthiness. There are no sailing canoes capable of venturing far beyond the reef, and no motorized vessels. This is in sharp contrast to the adjacent Austronesian-speaking communities in Baranusa and Marica, which are centered almost entirely on seafaring and fishing. Indeed, fishermen from Marica occasionally visit WP villages to barter dried fish for local rice. This dried fish is the primary source of fish-based protein in the WP diet.

The ocean in WP is distinguished as *tawá*, a term which contrasts with *halia* ‘water.’ The defining features of *tawá* are its expansiveness and its contrast with *mua* ‘earth; dirt; dani’ ‘ground’; *ir* ‘area, condition’; and *por* ‘earth’. In WP folklore *tawá* is bad, a destroyer. Unfortunate people fall into the ocean (*tawá-m baulung*) or are swallowed up by the ocean (*tawá-m muggung*). The sea rises to inundate villages (*tawá banuakang araung do habbang tang biring*) and comes flooding into boats (*tawá ma hai-m ipering*). When the ocean waves are rough, the ocean is angry (*tawá bo aroga*). Hence, it is no surprise that seascape terminology in WP is extremely circumscribed.

The most elaborate area of seascape terminology refers to the surface features of the shore. The shore above mean high tide is *hoang*, or beach. Tidal flats which are exposed at low tide are *tamu*, whereas a large flat reef is *hubi* and is an excellent place to search for intertidal life when the reef is exposed at low tide. The term *hubi* refers to physical shape rather than composition; the generic term for coral, whether a living reef or a rock extracted from a reef, is *lassang*. Any number of small pools, or *wee*, are exposed on a *hubi* when the tide is out, and these pools are extensively mapped and uniquely identified by toponyms. The roughly 1000 m long reef on the north side of Puntaru lagoon contains at least six named *wee*. Small reef fish and eels can be harvested from these *wee* by using a funnel-shaped basket (*sar* or *pilang*) to block off one of the entries to the “pond” while the tide recedes. Such natural pools are distinguished from *mappu*, man-made fish ponds built from rocks for a similar purpose.

Along this same reef are located four named volcanic erratics which protrude from the reef surface. These features are known by the generic term *hauwe*, and their corresponding toponyms are invariably preceded by this term, as in *Hauwe*.

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5. The reciprocal relationship between the WP speakers and the Austronesian speakers can be compared to that described for the Yup’ik and Chukchi of Chukotka (Kertulla 2000). The WP speakers specialize in farming, while the Austronesians specialize in marine resources.
Do Boling, literally, ‘far away least valued moko drum rock.’ These rocks serve as waypoints for navigating the reef surface.

Crucially, these reef toponyms represent local knowledge. While the six named wee and four named hauwe just mentioned are widely known to residents of Puntaru, few residents can provide names for similar features on the reef near Koliabang, a short 3 km walk to the south. The primary motivation for naming reef features is to guide subsistence harvest activities on the reef. Since these activities take place at dusk or early evening, residents do not travel far from the village in order to harvest. Hence, there is little knowledge of reef toponyms outside the local area.

While the reef, tide flats, and rocky points surrounding the lagoon are recognized as distinct landscape features, there is no generic term referring to lagoon. Admittedly, there are few lagoon-type features on Pantar, and even the lagoon at Puntaru is not well-defined as far as lagoons go (Figure 6). The opening in the reef is nearly as wide as the lagoon is deep, with the result that the lagoon offers only marginal protection from prevailing southerly swell, even at the lowest tides. Instead, the water inside the reef is known simply as tawá ‘ocean,’ undistinguished from the water outside the reef. Hence, my use of the term ‘Puntaru lagoon’ is a completely etic reference to a feature-type which is not locally distinguished. On

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6. A moko (WP kuang) is a bronze kettle drum used as a form of bride wealth in marriage exchange throughout Pantar and neighboring Alor.
the other hand, the area of Puntaru lagoon specifically is distinguished toponymically with the name Ang Blegur, literally ‘Blegur’s market,’ a reference to a barter market which has been held traditionally at this location.

The paucity of seascape feature terms in WP reflects the relatively minor role of the sea in WP culture. Though residing within close proximity of the ocean, WP speakers have not adopted a maritime culture. WP speakers engage with the ocean only in order to practice subsistence harvest of intertidal organisms on the exposed reef. Knowledge of and recognition of subsurface features is extremely limited.

7. An areal perspective

The data presented above show that WP landscape terminology and toponyms reflect the Pantar landscape and the WP speakers’ relationship to that landscape. While generic terms for elevations do exist, convex landforms such as mountains and hills are much more likely to be referred to using either (i) a locational noun denoting an area located uphill, or (ii) a toponym denoting a co-located village, settlement, or garden area. Vegetated areas are denoted by terms referring to cultivation, reflecting the importance of subsistence agriculture. Seascape and coastal terminology is limited, directly reflecting a cultural focus on subsistence agriculture and coastal foraging rather than active harvesting of ocean resources.

Clearly the most striking feature of WP landscape terminology is the lack of a generic term for ‘river.’ Rather, WP provides names for various types of aqueous substances: halia ‘water,’ matá ‘slightly sulfurous brine,’ and masi ‘highly sulfurous brine.’ Here the essential property is the quality of the substance, not the shape or character of the landform in which the substance flows or stands. In WP ‘water’ is halia regardless of whether it is found in a lake, running down a mountain, in a bubbling hot spring, or in a drinking glass.

The existence of distinct terms for different types of brine concentrations might be taken to be a mere case of mundane lexical specialization, risking a comparison with the trite “interestingness” of Eskimo snow vocabulary (Pullum 1989). However, the significance of WP streamscape vocabulary lies not in these distinct terms themselves but rather in the fact that WP chooses to focus on the quality of the substance rather than on the physical character of the landform created by that substance. From a geomorphology viewpoint halia, masi, and matá are essentially similar; they differ not in morphology but rather in chemistry. This focus on substance rather than form is not unique to WP but is found in at least some neighboring languages, in spite of their vastly different geographic and climatic settings.

Given that the volcanic environment of sulfurous brines is unique to WP, it is not surprising that other languages of the Alor-Pantar family lack terms for
sulfurous brine or even for sulfur itself. On the other hand, there is some variation in the treatment of the ‘river’ term. Teiwa, spoken just 15 km from the WP region on the northern peninsula of Pantar Island, distinguishes yir ‘water’ from the generic landscape term bo’oi ‘river’ (Klamer to appear). Similarly, the Klon language of southwest Alor distinguishes araa ‘water’ from weer ‘river’ (Baird 2008). Teiwa bo’oi and Klon weer are part of the standard landscape terminologies, denoting reference to landscape objects and serving as the generic component of toponyms. In Klon one can weer agai ‘go to the river’ and also Hwak Weer mi taa ‘sleep at Hwak River.’ In contrast, WP uses the substance terms halia, masi, and matá to fulfill this function. There is no WP term cognate with Teiwa bo’oi or Klon weer.

Elsewhere in the Alor archipelago we find streamscape terminologies more similar to that found in WP. Abui is spoken in the rugged interior mountains of central Alor, with many settlements located above 1000 m in elevation (the self-designation abui also means ‘mountain’). At this altitude mountain valleys are often shrouded in mist, and water sources are relatively abundant. The damp climate of the Abui language region contrasts greatly with the dry savanna of the WP region. Nevertheless Abui also lacks a distinct term for ‘river.’ There is no Abui term cognate with Teiwa bo’oi and Klon weer, and though Abui lu ‘valley’ may metonymically denote the river in the valley (compare WP salu), the more standard way to denote a body of water, flowing or not, is by combing the term ya ‘water’ with the augmentative wal (compare WP wala). Thus, ya wal ‘river, pond’ (Kratochvíl & Delpada 2008). The augmentative morpheme is found in other Abui landscape terms as well, such as tama wal ‘ocean.’ (Although the WP cognate wala does not occur with landscape terms, it serves a similar function, as in kuba wala ‘midwife,’ derived from kuba ‘old woman.’) Thus, in Abui a river – or any other body of water – is simply ‘water.’

These limited comparative data provide some evidence that the conceptualization of landscape in WP is more deeply embedded within the language family, reflecting a unique world view. Such a tentative conclusion must of course be viewed with great caution. As noted at the outset, an exotic landscape invites exotic linguistic interpretations; to avoid such pitfalls we must rely on solid ethnographic methodology. Enormous progress has been made recently toward the documentation of grammatical structures in the Alor-Pantar languages, yet the landscape domain remains only cursorily documented. Given the demonstrated categorical mismatch between landscape categories in WP and those in English, Indonesian, and other languages of wider communication, it is necessary to do more than simply elicit translational equivalents of a given set of landscape terms. Rather, as Burenhult and Levinson (2008) suggest, it is necessary to tease out the underlying indigenous landscape ontologies. Much work remains to be done.
References


