

Wrangling words in Wallacea: Assumptions and fallacies in linguistic history

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This talk examines, and questions, some persistent traditions in the study of the linguistic history of Wallacea. Over several thousand years, Wallacea—the area of eastern Indonesia and western New Guinea—has been a zone of intense contact and exchange between groups of different linguistic affiliations, fuelled by trade and migration. Nonetheless, many of the ideas about the linguistic history of Wallacea have been formed in isolation from other disciplines concerned with the human past, such as history, archaeology and genetics, and are discordant with them. In this talk, I present the results of recent work into loanwords across Linguistic Wallacea and examine how these impact our understanding of the region.