

# Report on initial fieldwork on Yapese

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# Outline

- Background on Yapese
- Findings from the field
- Future plans and prospects



Me and my primary consultant, Edmund Pasan.

# Yapese

- ISO 639-3: yap; Glottocode: yape1248
- Austronesian
  - Malayo-Polynesian > CEMP > EMP > Oceanic
  - Likely a top-level subgroup of Oceanic
- Around 5,200 speakers on Yap, in the FSM

# Why Yapese?

- Understudied
- Innovative phonologically
  - One of the largest segmental inventories of any Austronesian language
  - Has phonological features that are uncommon in Austronesian and the world's languages (e.g., ejective fricatives, glottalized sonorants)
- Complex linguistic history
  - Extensive contact with Palauan and Nuclear Micronesian languages

# Previous work on Yapese

- Dissertation on phonology and morphophonemics (Hsu 1969)
- Grammar and dictionary (Jensen 1977a, 1977b)
- Cassette tape language learning course by Jensen for Peace Corps (approx. 10 hrs., digitized by the UH Library)
- Some phonetic work on Yapese glottalized sonorants (Maddieson and Larson 2002)



# Yapese phonology



The Yapese Living History Museum, in Colonia.

# Consonants

		Bilabial	Dental	Retroflex/ Palatal	Velar	Glottal
<b>Stop</b>	<i>Voiceless</i>	p	t	ʈ	k	ʔ
	<i>Ejective</i>	pʼ	tʼ		kʼ	
<b>Fricative</b>	<i>Voiceless</i>	f	θ	ʂ		(h)
	<i>Ejective</i>	fʼ	θʼ			
	<i>Voiced</i>	β	ð	(ʐ)	ɣ	
<b>Nasal</b>	<i>Plain</i>	m	n		ŋ	
	<i>Glottalized</i>	mʔ	nʔ		(ŋʔ)	
<b>Liquids</b>	<i>Plain</i>		l	ɭ		
	<i>Glottalized</i>		lʔ			
<b>Glides</b>	<i>Plain</i>			j	w	
	<i>Glottalized</i>			jʔ	(wʔ)	

Table 1 — Yapese consonants.

# Vowels

	<b>Front</b>		<b>Back</b>	
	<i>Light</i>	<i>Plain</i>	<i>Light</i>	<i>Plain</i>
<b>Close</b>	i		u	
<b>Mid</b>	e	ɛ	ə	ɔ
<b>Low</b>	æ			ɑ

Table 2 — Yapese short vowels.  
(*n.b.* Long vowels are otherwise equivalent in quality.)

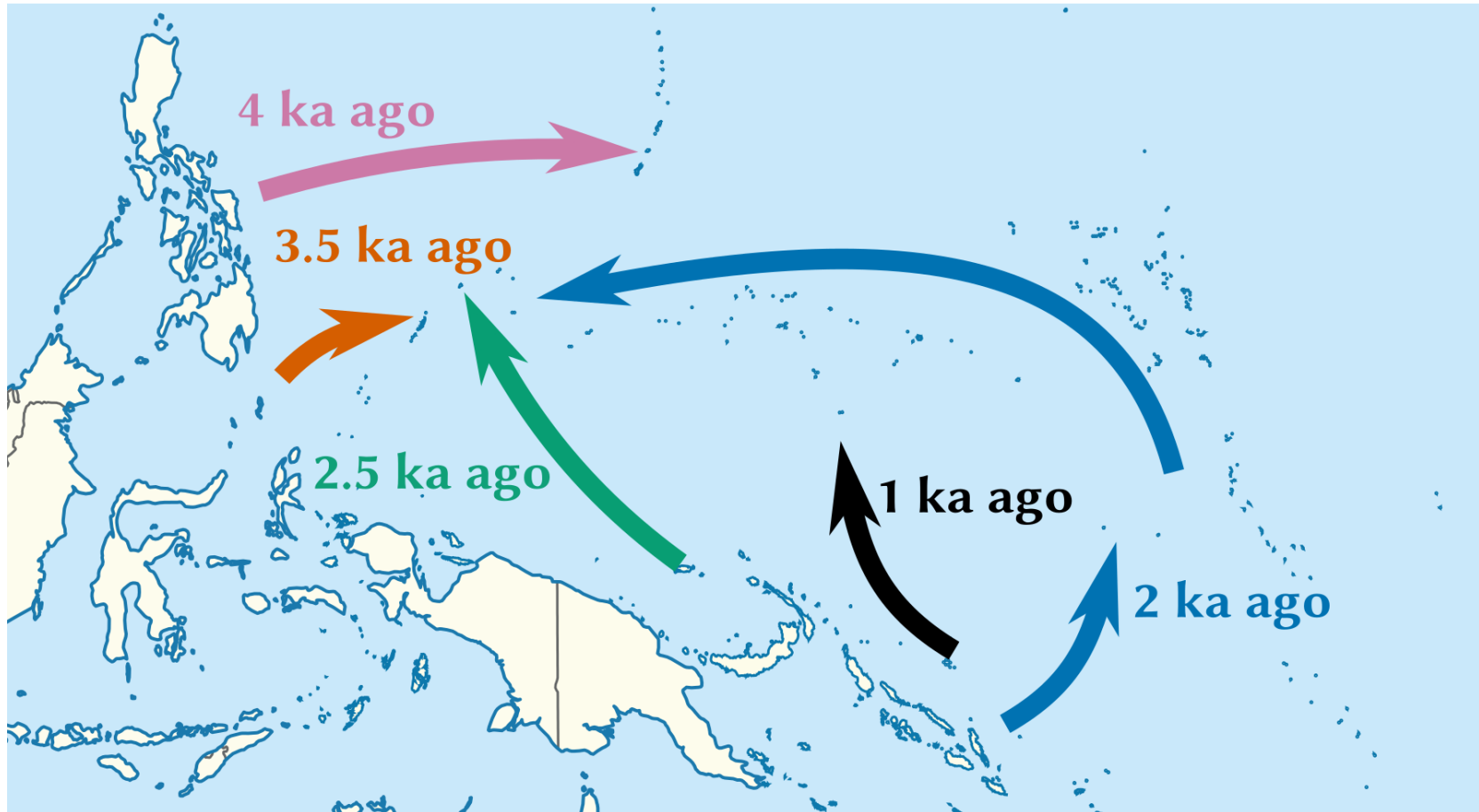


# Language contact



Two small *raay* (pieces of stone money mined on Palau) at the Yapese Cooperative Association in Colonia.

# Human settlement of Micronesia

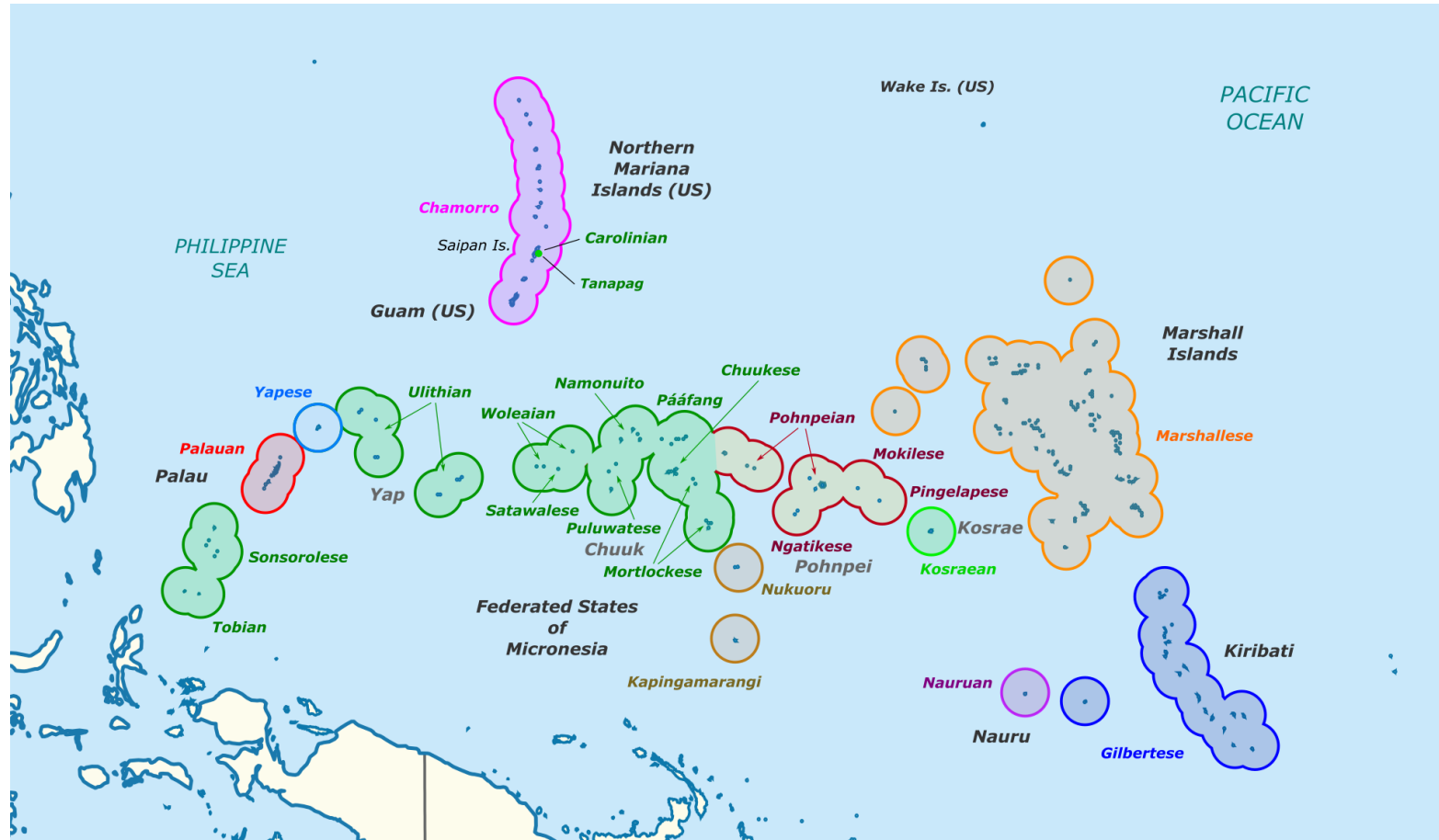


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# Languages of Micronesia

- At least 5 distinct ethnolinguistic groups:
  - CHamoru (Chamorro)
  - Palauan
  - Yapese
  - Micronesians proper
    - Majority in Nauru, Kiribati, the Marshalls, the FSM
    - Minority in Palau, the Northern Marianas, and Mapia Atoll, Indonesia
  - Polynesians
    - On the atolls of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi in the FSM

# Languages of Micronesia



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# Language contact

- Yapese *luwod* ‘squid’ ← Palauan *luut*
- Yapese *riich* ‘ti plant (*Cordyline fruticosa*)’ ← Palauan *sis*
- Yapese *weach* ‘white; lime’ ← Palauan *chaus* ‘lime (for betel nut)’

# Language contact

- Yapese *fisiiraen* ‘Venus; morning/evening star’ ← Ulithian *fisirael*
- Yapese *folfol* ‘steps on coconut tree’ ← Woleaian *farefara*
- Yapese *maar* ‘preserved breadfruit’ ← Ulithian *maar*

# Language contact

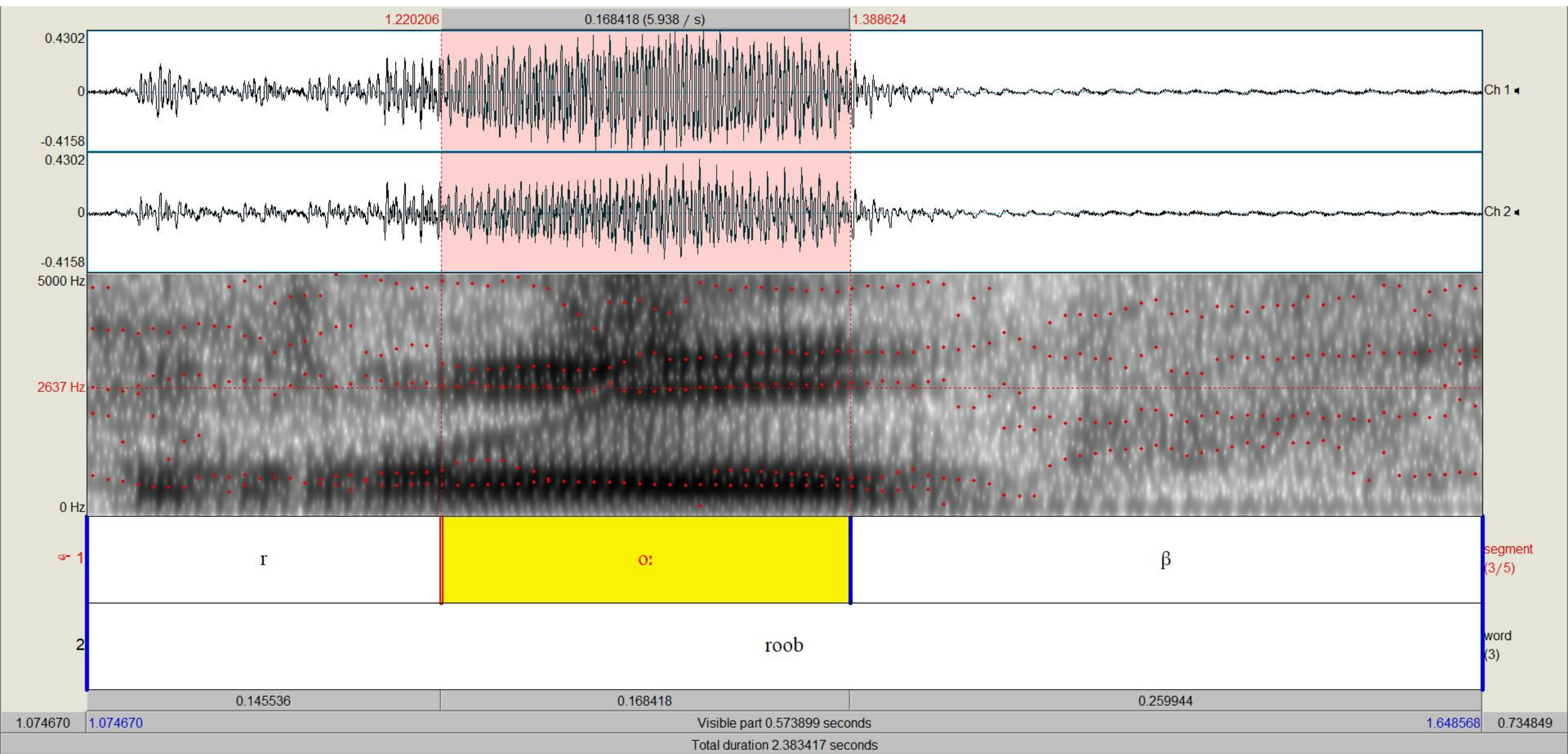
- Yapese *rat* ‘bicycle’ ← German (*Fahr*)*rad* ‘bicycle’
- Yapese *sikoekii* ‘airplane’ ← Japanese 飛行機 *hikōki*
- Yapese *geas* ‘gasoline’ ← English *gas*

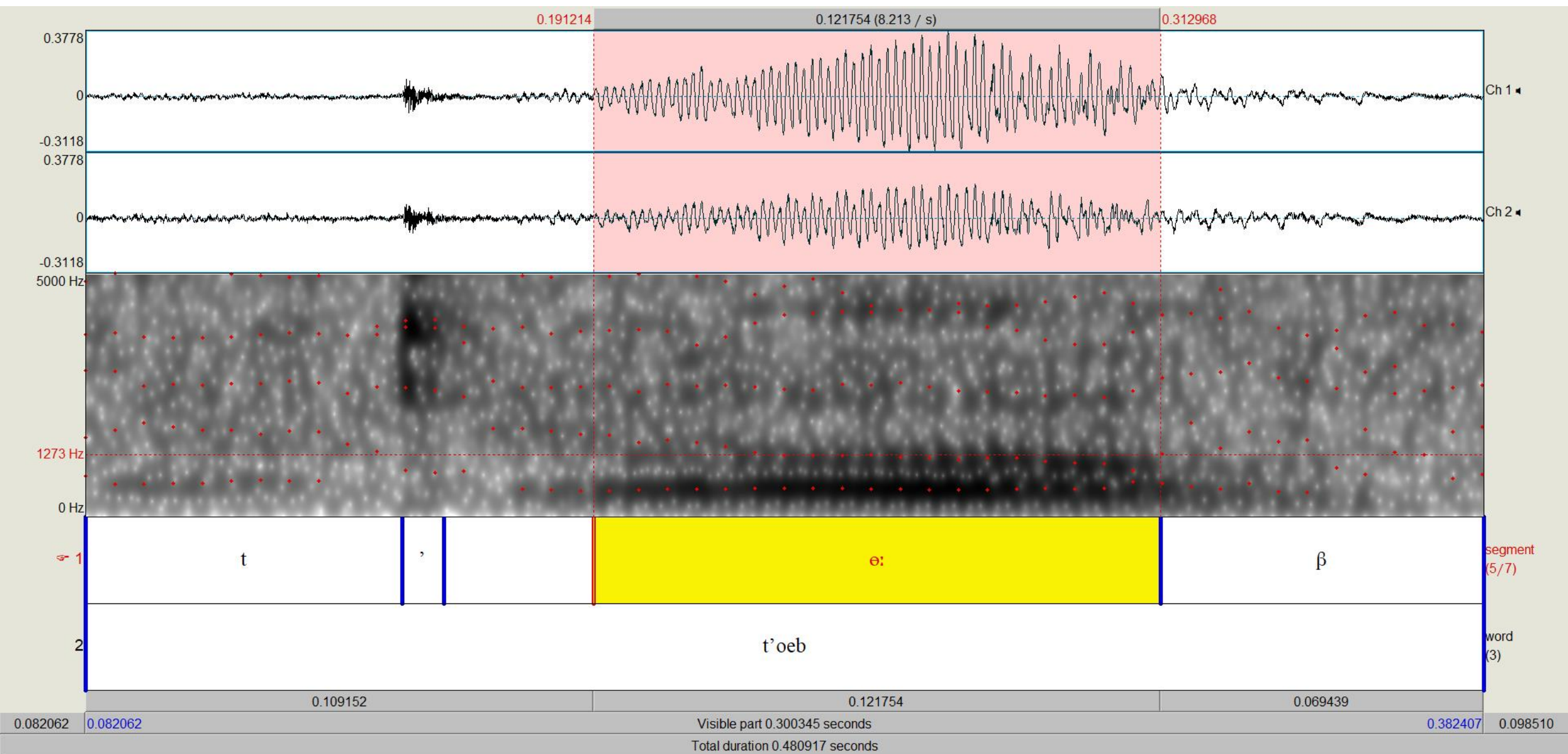


# Vowel qualities and palatalization



Chamorro Bay and the Pacific Ocean.







# Assessing the vitality of Yapese



Chamorro Bay and Colonia, from Taalguw.

# Language Endangerment Index (after ELCat)

Level of endangerment	5 Critically endangered	4 Severely endangered	3 Endangered	2 Threatened	1 Vulnerable	0 Safe
<b>Intergenerational transmission</b>	Only a few elderly speakers	Most elderly, few adults	Some adults, no children	Most adults, few children	Most adults, some children	All community members
<b>Absolute number of speakers</b>	1–9	10–99	100–999	1,000–9,999	10,000–99,999	>100,000
<b>Speaker number trends</b>	A small percentage of the community are speakers; speaker numbers decreasing very rapidly	Less than half of the community are speakers; speaker numbers decreasing at an accelerated pace	Only about half of community members are speakers; speakers numbers decreasing steadily, but not accelerating	Majority of the community members are speakers; speaker numbers gradually decreasing	Most community members are speakers; speaker numbers decreasing only slowly	Almost all community members are speakers; speaker numbers stable or increasing
<b>Domains of use</b>	Only in a few specific domains	Used mainly in the home/with the family; may not be the primary language even in these domains	Used mainly in the home/with the family; remains the primary language in these domains	Used in some non-official domains along with other languages; primary language in the home	Used in most domains except for official ones (government, mass media, education, etc.)	Used in most domains, including official ones

# Intergenerational transmission

- Essentially all ethnically Yapese adults speak Yapese
- Some young children do not, especially among emigrees or people who spend time off-island

# Absolute number of speakers

- Number of ethnic Yapese in the FSM: 5,399
- Number of speakers using Yapese at home: 5,098



# Speaker number trends

- On this trip, and through the FSM Division of Statistics, I was not able to gather quantitative data on speaker number trends
- However, I did gather some quantitative data interviewing my participants
- Speaker numbers have been stable, but the current generation of parents is beginning to raise their children only using English

# Domains of use — Official

- The government of the FSM and Yap State operate in English
  - Constitutional protection against linguistic discrimination (FSM Constitution: Art. IV, Sec. 4)
  - Affirmative obligation to provide education, but no case law regarding language in schools (FSM Constitution: Art XIII, Sec. 1)



# Domains of use — Official

- There is a local TV channel, but most channels in English
- Religious officials and institutions promote English usage, though there is a translation of the Bible into Yapese
- Secular and religious schools are English-language medium

# Domains of use — Literacy

- 89% literacy in Yap State
- No standardized orthography, though several attempts at standardization have been made
- Glottal stop:
  - Most recent grammar and dictionary use <q> for glottal stop
  - All speakers I met do not like this convention and either use <‘> or omit it
- Vowels:
  - Speakers do not distinguish light (palatalizing) from plain vowels in writing
  - Speakers do not distinguish long and short vowels in writing

# Domains of use — Community/family

- Signage is typically in English, with Yapese added for “flavor”
- Yapese is used in the community and at community events, though English also has a conspicuous presence
- Adult family members generally use Yapese among themselves
- Parents under 30 often speak to their children partially or solely in English

# Status of endangerment

- Intergenerational transmission
  - Level: 2 (Threatened)
- Absolute number of speakers
  - Level: 2 (Threatened)
- Speaker number trends
  - Level: Unknown
- Domains of use
  - Level: 1 (Vulnerable)
- **Overall assessment:**
  - Threatened
  - 80% certain, based on evidence available



# Future plans and prospects



Wind turbines on Mt. Madëqdëq, overlooking Chamorro Bay.



# Future plans and prospects

- Return to Yap for more fieldwork
- Detailed study of Yapese phonetics
  - Acoustic measures of vowel qualities
  - Phonetic realization of glottalized consonants
  - Actual place of articulation for palatal/retroflex consonants
  - Nature of stress (fixed? predictable?)
- Study of Yapese sociolinguistics
  - More quant/qual work on language endangerment
  - Study of Yapese dialect variation
  - Study of all of the above with Yapese emigres in Honolulu

# References

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Local *pilis* consultant (and beggar at dinner) Happy.