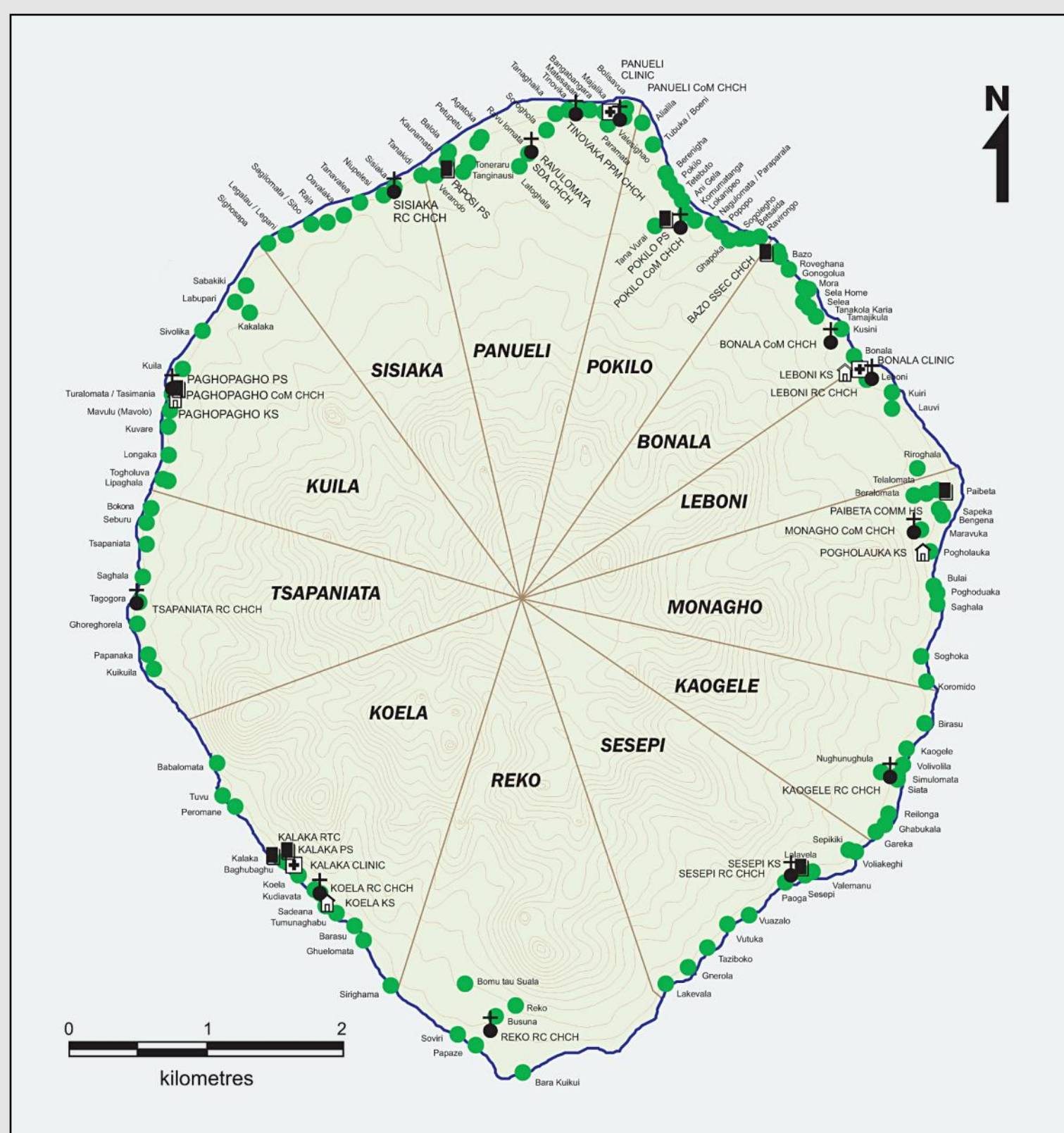




Documentation of a Papuan language spoken in the Solomon Islands

Savosavo is an endangered Papuan (non-Austronesian) language spoken by about 3,000 people on Savo Island, a small volcanic island in the Central Province of the Solomon Islands. Out of the more than 60 indigenous languages of the Solomon Islands it is one of only four languages that do not belong to the Austronesian language family. These four non-Austronesian languages are all that remains of the languages of the first migration waves into the Solomon Islands, which took place probably around 20,000 years ago. They might be related to each other, but each has unique characteristics distinguishing it from the other three, and from the surrounding Austronesian languages.



Map of Savo Island showing a selection of the collected and geo-located place names and social infrastructure (created by Ian Scales)

Endangerment

As a former British colony, Solomon Islands have English as the official language, but it is not widely spoken. The main threat to Savosavo today are not English or any of the other indigenous languages, but Solomon Islands Pijin. This is an English-based creole that is spoken by almost everyone in the country today, and is used more and more in urban centers, villages, and homes.



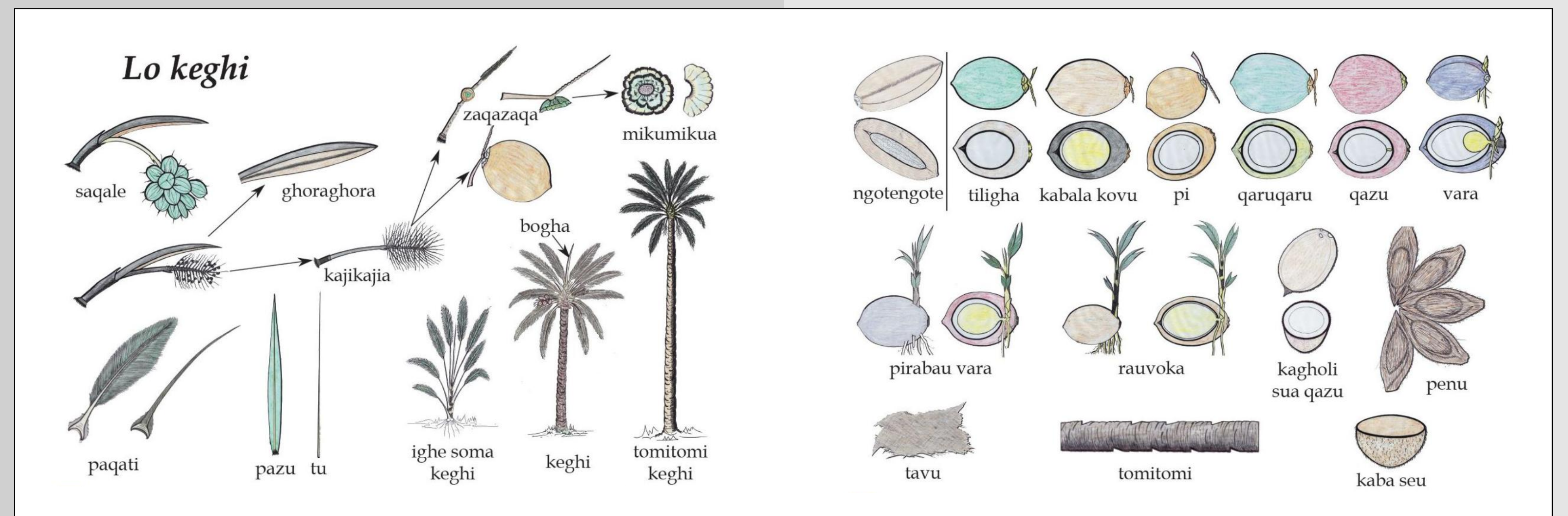
School children reading the materials handed over to local schools - for the first time seeing their own language in print

The people

Savo Islanders are mostly subsistence farmers and fishermen, living off the vegetables, root crops and fruit they grow in their inland gardens, and the seafood they catch and collect in the sea. They also have chicken and pigs, which are eaten on special occasions. Social organization is based on clan membership, which is inherited through the mother's line and determines the rights to lands and marine resources.



Different designs of fishing bridges are suited for catching different types of fish. Here are two of the fishing bridges built during project workshops: a *koku* fishing bridge, and a *tatata* fishing bridge.



A4-plate with coconut terminology, illustrated by the local artist Jim Planet

The project

Since the beginning of the project in 2007, the Savosavo project team collected recordings from several genres (narratives, interviews, conversations, and performances) which were stored in the DoBeS online archive. The main themes were tradition, culture, and environment, and the collection includes:

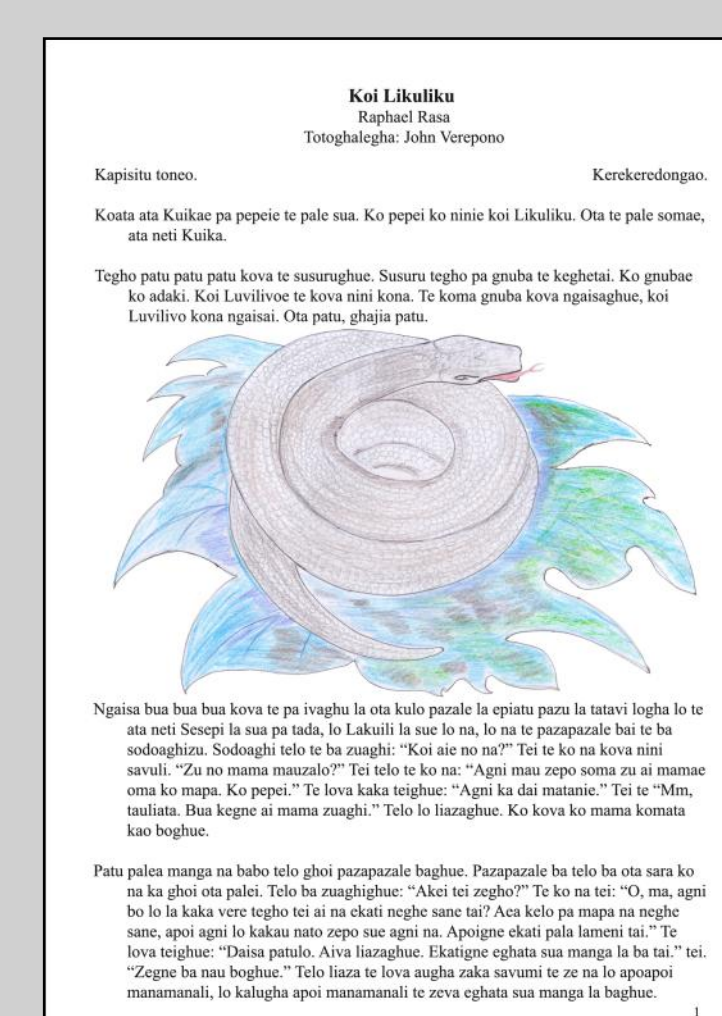
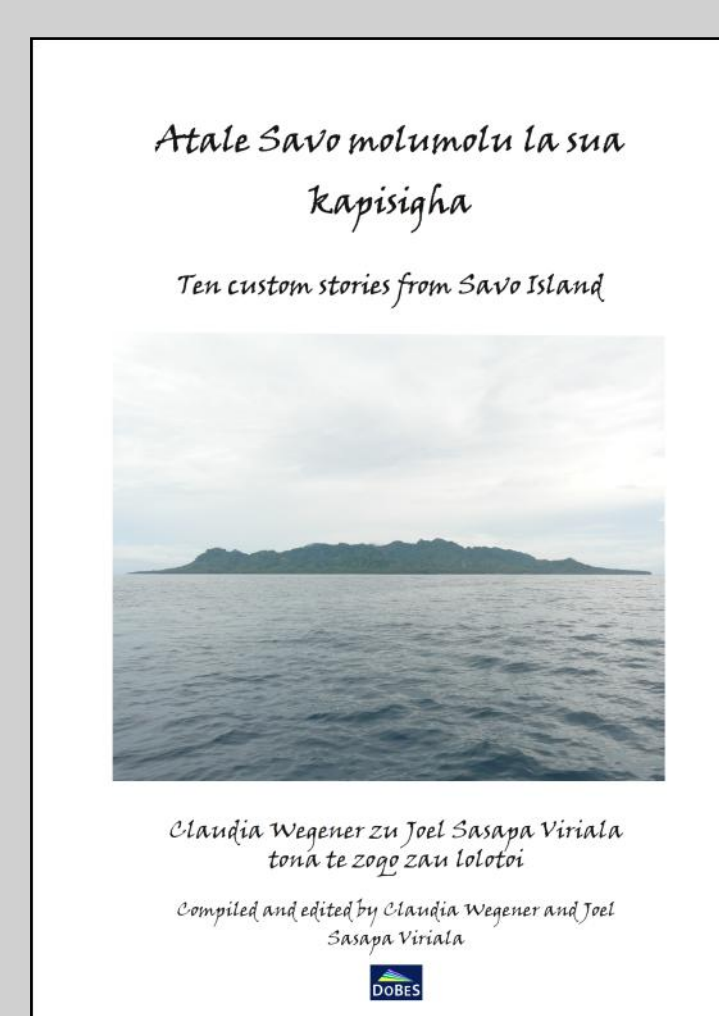
- » traditional legends
- » funny stories about how certain animals came to behave the way they do
- » historical events, (auto)biographic stories
- » stories about traditions and the organization of society in the old days
- » explanations on how to make traditional artifacts, tools and food
- » a list of more than 300 place names around Savo Island, with their exact GPS-location, and interviews with local chiefs on their meanings
- » songs and dances

ovoro /^hoʔoro/ *n.* Fish, Snapper (see *sazi*); **Pa vata lou sua mie. Sazi lova ngaie, karango tave la pai kia lighilighi la te pale keva sue;** A kind of edible fish. It is like a *sazi*, but bigger, it lives at the seawards edge of the reef or the seaside. *To raghilitu lo ovoroze sapili telo edo kurogha mananalizu.* "The *ovoro* they caught they sliced and it fit into two pots."

One entry from the thematic dictionary on fish

A large number of all recordings were transcribed in a practical orthography developed by the project team, and English translations and/or interlinear glossing was added to many of them. Based on these recordings, a number of materials for the communities were produced, and copies of some of them have been handed over to local schools in 2009. Some materials are still under production; so far, the following materials are available:

- » a storybook with 10 traditional legends, illustrated by three local artists
- » an illustrated primer of the practical orthography
- » a course book for Savosavo literacy classes
- » a map of Savo Island
- » illustrated A4-plates with terms for carrying and holding, coconut parts and growth stages, and numbers.



Title and example page from the storybook (artwork by local artist John Verepono)

The project team also organized four workshops on the building of different types of traditional fishing bridges. During these workshops, an elder instructed a team of young men on how to build each different bridge. The whole production including commentaries on materials and procedural stages was recorded and archived. For two of the fishing bridges, DVDs were created on the basis of these recordings, and were then distributed to the participants.

Finally, 14 thematic dictionaries on several topics (including plants, birds, fish, shells, insects etc.) were produced. Each entry contains a Savosavo definition and an English definition, and most also include a Savosavo example sentence with its English translation.



Traditional food: Wrapping traditional *korikori bulake* pudding in leaves before baking it in an earth oven, and another type of pudding, *kalu*, in a traditional wooden bowl

The Savosavo project team

- » Prof. Dr. Eva Schultze-Berndt, linguist, University of Manchester
- » Dr. Claudia Wegener, linguist, University of Bielefeld
- » Aurélie Cauchard, M.A., linguist, University of Manchester
- » Edmond Gagavo, research assistant, artist and native speaker of Savosavo
- » Prof. Dr. Ulrike Mosel, linguist, University of Kiel
- » Dr. Ian Scales, anthropologist, Australian National University, Canberra
- » James Pulusala, Joel Sasapa Viriala, Felix Narasia, Savo Island local assistants
- » Numerous Savosavo speakers and experts on language and culture



The three local assistants and some members of the dictionary team. In the back, from left to right: Bill Adamson, Joel Sasapa Viriala, Andrew Rara, Wilson Sungi, James Pulusala and Felix Narasia. In the front row, from left to right: Jim Planet, Charles Ghorosavo, John Ninizepot and Anthony Pisupisu.

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