

1

INTRODUCTION

This is a grammatical sketch of Pondi [ISO 639-3 Inm, Glottocode lang1328], a severely endangered language spoken by fewer than 300 people, almost all of whom live in a single village in the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Pondi is a non-Austronesian (i.e. Papuan) language, belonging to the Ulmapo branch of the Keram family.

1.1 Organisation

In this introductory chapter, I briefly describe the previous research on the language (§1.2) and my own research methodology (§1.3), before explaining the orthography and presentation of examples in this grammar (§1.4). Then I provide some extralinguistic context for the Pondi language and people (§1.5), describe its level of endangerment (§1.6), and discuss its genetic classification (§1.7). Chapter 1 concludes with a typological overview of Pondi's grammar (§1.8). Chapter 2 covers matters of phonetics and phonology. Then I discuss the morphology of two very important word classes: nouns (Chapter 3) and verbs (Chapter 4). After this, I cover other, smaller word classes, including pronouns, determiners, and postpositions (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6, I consider syntactic phenomena that exist at the level of the phrase, including nominal number and possession (for noun phrases) and compound verbs and equational constructions (for verb phrases). Then, in Chapter 7, I turn to clausal syntax, looking at basic constituent order, alignment, core arguments and obliques, and monoclausal sentences. The focus of Chapter 8 is the syntax of the Pondi sentence, beginning with a discussion of complex sentences before turning to a number of syntactic topics—namely, questions,

commands, negation, reported speech, and conditional sentences. Finally, Chapter 9 provides a lexicon of over 600 Pondi words, presented both as a Pondi-to-English word list and as an English-to-Pondi finder list. I have also included Swadesh and SIL word lists to serve as handy reference for crosslinguistic comparison.

1.2 Previous research on the language

Prior to 2016, there was only minimal linguistic research concerning the Pondi language. Donald Laycock (1973:36) first identified the language (as ‘Langam’) in the linguistic literature, following a survey trip in 1971, during which he produced 21 pages of handwritten field notes, including a word list of about 200 words and some basic sentences that he had elicited. These have never been published, but digital copies of his field notebooks (including these notes on Pondi) are available through the PARADISEC online archive (Laycock 1971).

Pondi’s two closest relatives are Ulwa and Mwakai. Barlow (2018) is a reference grammar of Ulwa. Barlow (2020) offers grammatical notes on Mwakai.

1.3 Methodology

The descriptions and analyses here are based on two field trips. On the first field trip (July 2016), I visited Langam village, where Pondi is spoken. I spent about 12 hours eliciting words and sentences over the course of two days. My three consultants then were Bonny Koiana (born 1966), Clement Katram (born 1973), and Robert Kupo (born around 1965). On the second field trip (August 2018), I met with just Bonny Koiana and Clement Katram, who travelled to Manu village (about a day’s walk away from Langam) to work with me. There I spent about 18 hours eliciting data over the course of three days. In total, I have recorded about 27 hours of Pondi digital audio data, which is archived with PARADISEC (Barlow 2016). Elicitation was conducted by using Tok Pisin as a contact language (all examples included in this grammar are taken from elicited sentences). It goes without saying that, given the limited time spent with consultants and the absence of a corpus of naturalistic texts, the descriptions found in this book are simply the best I can offer, given the quantity and quality of data.

1.4 Orthography and presentation

The working orthography has been chosen here so as to avoid less common (or more difficult to type) characters (such as <ⁿdʒ>) as well as to facilitate phonological comparison with Pondi's sister languages Ulwa (Barlow 2018) and Mwakai (Barlow 2020). Although phonetic realisations differ, the same basic set of graphemes is used for all three languages, with the only exception that Mwakai uses <r> where Pondi and Ulwa use <l> to represent the single liquid phoneme.

The graphemes used in this orthography mostly match those found in the IPA. The exceptions are as follows: <mb> = /^mb/, <nd> = /ⁿd/, <ng> = /ⁿg/, <nj> = /ⁿdʒ/, and <i> = /i/.

Pondi examples are presented in four lines: the first is a phonemic transcription, the second is a morpheme-by-morpheme morphological analysis of the utterance, the third is a morphological gloss, and the fourth is a translation of the utterance into English. In the first line, the working orthography is used to transcribe words as they are pronounced following any phonological rules. In the second line, morphemes are separated such that a tabbed space comes between phonological words, an equal sign (=) comes between clitics and their host words, and a hyphen (-) comes between bound morphemes within a single word. In the third line, I have followed, wherever possible, the conventions of the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Comrie et al. 2008). In the fourth line—the English translation—I have attempted to be as literal as possible. Where further clarification or a more literal translation is deemed helpful, this is provided parenthetically, following the translation.

Pondi words that appear within the English text are written in *italics*. A hyphen at the end of a verb indicates that the form presented is an uninflected root; a hyphen at the end of a nominal (i.e. a noun or adjective) indicates that the form presented is not marked in any way for number.

1.5 Pondi: The language and its speakers

In the following subsections I provide some basic contextual information on the name of the language (§1.5.1), the environment in which it is spoken (§1.5.2)—in particular the village Langam (§1.5.3)—the Pondi people (§1.5.4), their relationships with speakers of other languages and possible lexical borrowing (§1.5.5), and linguistic variation (§1.5.6).

1.5.1 The name of the language

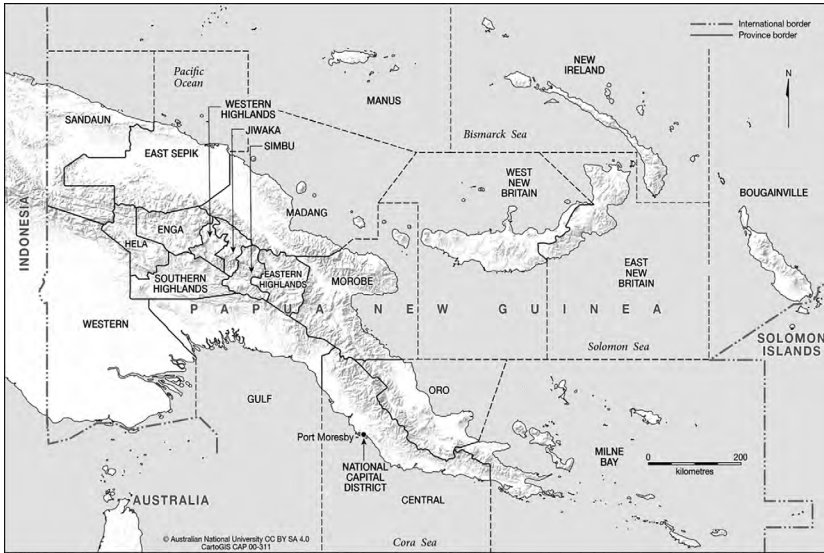
It is my impression that, until recently, it was not common for language communities in the region to have well-established names for their languages. To refer to Pondi, Laycock (1973:36) used the exonym *Langam*, which is the Tok Pisin name for the village where Pondi is spoken.¹ When I asked speakers in 2016 what their language was called, some could think of no name, some offered *Pondi*, and others offered *Mwa*. The word *mwa*, which means ‘no’ or ‘nothing’, seems to have been patterned on the names of nearby languages such as Ap Ma (in which language *ap ma* means ‘no, nothing’). Indeed, there seems to be a recent trend of linguistic communities adopting endonyms based on their respective words for ‘no’ or ‘nothing’: other cases include Kanda (Lower Sepik family) and Ulwa (Keram family). However, I have avoided using *Mwa* as a glottonym, since *mwa* also means ‘no, nothing’ in Pondi’s sister language Mwakai (in which language *mwakai* is an emphatic form of *mwa*). The name Pondi, on the other hand, which is said to have been the name of a traditional founder figure, refers to the collective linguistic community. I have chosen to use it as the name of the language in accordance with the wishes of the majority of speakers with whom I have discussed the matter. It also has the advantage of differentiating the name of the village (Langam) from the name of the language (Pondi), without resorting to locally unfamiliar derivations (e.g. *Langamese*).

1.5.2 The environment

The environment in which the Pondi people live is tropical swampy rainforest. The nearest year-round navigable river is the Yuat, which is about 4 km (2.5 miles) west of Langam (as the crow flies), and can be reached via a creek when the water levels are high enough—that is, in the rainy season. The Yuat River is a tributary of the Sepik, the mighty serpentine river that serves as the major highway running through the swamps and jungles of the province.

Map 1.1 depicts PNG. The East Sepik Province (where Pondi is spoken) is located towards the north-west of the country.

¹ This glottonym (Langam) has been adopted by *Ethnologue* and, as of the 23rd edition, is still used to refer to the language (Eberhard et al. 2020). *Glottolog* (version 4.2.1) uses the name Pondi (Hammarström et al. 2020).



Map 1.1. Papua New Guinea.

Source: Map reproduced with the permission of CartoGIS Services, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University. Available online at asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/base-maps/png-provinces.

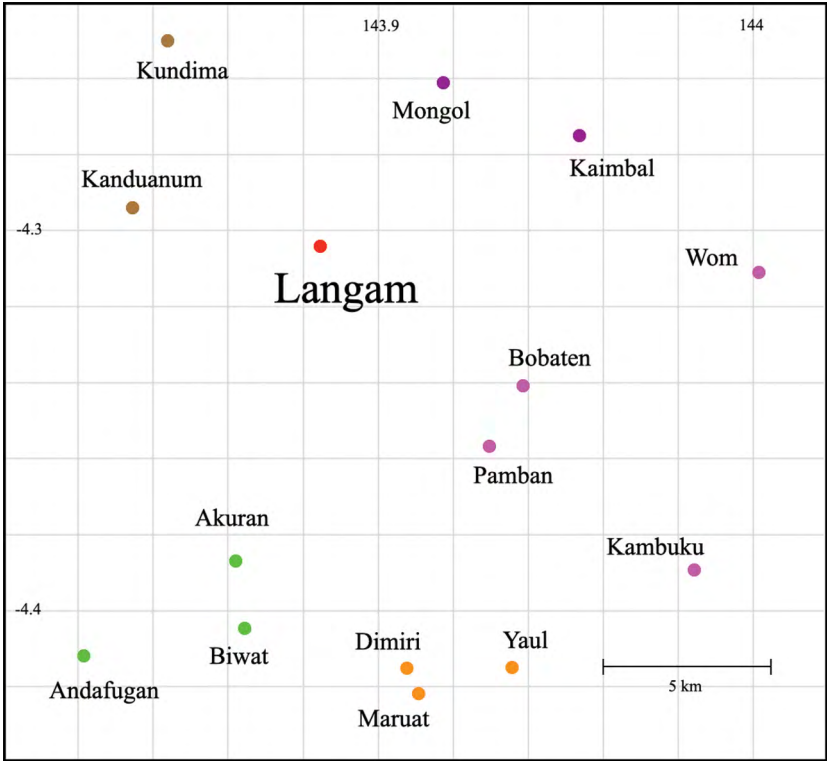
1.5.3 Langam village

Langam village, where almost all Pondi speakers live, is located in the Keram Rural Local-Level Government area of Angoram District, East Sepik Province, PNG. The geographic coordinates of Langam are $4^{\circ}18'15''\text{S}$, $143^{\circ}53'5''\text{E}$ (-4.304, 143.885). The endonym for the village is Amonan. Langam lies about 7 km (4 miles) south-west of Kaimbal and Mongol (the two Mwakai-speaking villages), about 13 km (8 miles) north-west of Maruat, Dimiri, and Yaul (the closest Ulwa-speaking villages), and about 25 km (16 miles) north-west of Manu (the fourth and farthest Ulwa-speaking village). The other nearest villages include some Kanda-speaking villages to the north and west, Mundukumo-speaking villages to the west and south, and Ap Ma-speaking villages to the south and east.

The village has no health clinic and no school. A primary school was founded in 2010, but is currently defunct, awaiting official certification, materials, and teachers. There are two churches in the village: one Catholic and the other Assemblies of God.

The village consists of 87 houses, sitting on either side of a single path that runs about 0.8 km (0.5 miles) from end to end.

Map 1.2 depicts the location of Langam village and its neighbouring villages, with different colours indicating the different languages traditionally spoken in these villages.



Map 1.2. Langam village and its neighbours.

Six languages are spoken in this small area: Pondi [lnm] (Langam), Kanda [aog] (Kundima, Kanduanum), Mwakai [mgt] (Mongol, Kaimbal), Ap Ma [kbx] (Wom, Bobaten, Pamban, Kambuku), Mundukumo [bwm] (Akuran, Biwat, Andafugan), Ulwa [yla] (Dimiri, Yaul, Maruat). Source: Author's depiction.

1.5.4 The people

There are about 600 ethnic Pondis, almost all of whom live in Langam village. There they subsist on a combination of hunting, gathering, fishing, and horticulture. The most important staple carbohydrate and single greatest source of food energy is sago, a starch that must be painstakingly

extracted from various species of palms of the *Metroxylon* genus, processed and strained to form a flour (*ilas* in Pondi), and then prepared either by frying to create a chewy pancake (*kimi*) or—more commonly—by mixing with boiling water to create a jelly (*ke*). This is eaten with almost every meal (indeed, *ke* ‘jellied sago’ is also the general Pondi word for ‘food’). The work of processing sago is traditionally the domain of women. Some people maintain small banana and coconut plantations. Bananas (generally of the starchy plantain variety, which need to be cooked) are another source of carbohydrates. Coconuts are a major source of dietary fats. Protein, when available, mostly comes from the creek that runs near the village. People fish with traps, nets, and sometimes just their bare hands. Protein also comes in the form of grubs, which are harvested from the stems of certain palm species. The men of the village also occasionally hunt with spears: pigs, bandicoots, and crocodiles are the most common game. Finally, various leafy green vegetables are gathered from the surrounding jungle.

The favourite recreational drug of the Pondi people is betel nut (the fruit of the *Areca catechu* palm), which is chewed with lime (calcium hydroxide) along with the leaf or flower of the *Piper betle* vine (‘betel pepper’) to produce the effects of a mild stimulant.

Although the Pondi people meet most of their needs with what they can find and make in the jungle, a small amount of cash does enter the community. Some people produce surplus sago, which they transport via canoe to sell in the town of Angoram. People use cash to buy things like clothes, soap, pots, and non-perishable food items, such as rice, canned fish, and salt.

The Pondi people all identify as being Christian. Most people belong either to the Catholic Church or to the Assemblies of God congregation, each of which has a designated church structure found within Langam village. A few people are members of the Christian Revival Church, although this has no physical place of worship in Langam.

A census conducted in July 2016 at my behest revealed that there were 616 residents of Langam village. Of these, all but one were ethnic Pondis, born and raised in Langam village (the one exception was a woman from the Mwakai-speaking Mongol village who had married a Pondi man and moved to his village). I was told that there were only two ethnic Pondis who were living outside Langam village (a man living in the Kanda-speaking Magendo village and a woman living in the Mundukumo-

speaking Biwat village). Of these 616 people, 265 were estimated to be around 30 years old or older, 66 between around 20 and 30 years old, and 285 younger than 20 years old (people in Langam tend not to know exact ages, including their own). At that time (2016), I estimated that people older than 30 tended to be fluent speakers (of varying degrees of proficiency), whereas people in their twenties only seemed capable of producing basic phrases (although their comprehension might have been quite good). It struck me that people younger than 20 could neither produce nor understand Pondi.

1.5.5 Relationships with neighbouring villages and borrowing

The village closest to the Pondi-speaking community (as the crow flies) is Kanduanum, on the Yuat River, about 5.5 km (3.4 miles) to the west of Langam. The people of Kanduanum traditionally speak the Kanda language (also known as Angoram [aog, angol255]), which belongs to the Lower Sepik family. Farther north, along the Yuat River, there are other Kanda villages (such as Kundima), and, farther north still, past the confluence with the Sepik River, is the Kanda village of Kambrindo, an important way station for river travel. The second-closest village to the Pondi village of Langam is Mongol, about 6.0 km (3.7 miles) north-east, as the crow flies. The Mongol population traditionally spoke Pondi's sister language Mwakai (also known as Mongol [mgt, mongl344]). Today, the village is mostly vacant, as the majority of its inhabitants abandoned the village in the 1970s, fleeing inhospitable conditions (including a lack of potable water) for settlements in the outskirts of Angoram town. Slightly further to the east is the other Mwakai-speaking village, Kaimbal, whose population is more robust. The third-closest village to the Pondis is Bobaten, about 7.0 km (4.4 miles) south-east, as the crow flies. The people of Bobaten traditionally speak Ap Ma (also known as Kambot or Botin [kbx, apma1241]), which also belongs to the Keram family. There are several other Ap Ma villages farther to the south and to the east, the closest of which are Pamban, Kambuku, and Wom. Bobaten and Wom serve as two important way stations when navigating the bayous and creeks connecting Langam village to the Sepik River. To the west and south are villages that speak Mundukumo (also known as Biwat [bwm, biwa1243]), which belongs to the Yuat family. Also, not too far from Pondi are villages that speak Pondi's sister language Ulwa (also known as Yaul [yla, yaul1241]).

It is thus not uncommon for Pondi speakers to have contact with members of other villages (and, as a result, with speakers of other languages). Whether travelling by foot or by boat, Pondi speakers can reach a number of different linguistic communities within a day (and, vice versa, visitors from a number of different linguistic communities can visit Pondi speakers relatively easily). In practice, it is much more common for men to travel than for women to do so. Accordingly, there are (or at least used to be) more multilingual men than multilingual women. It is my impression, however, that nowadays very few Pondis speak the languages of neighbouring communities at all fluently. Before the spread of Tok Pisin in the previous century, it must have been common for people of the region to speak multiple regional languages. As the new lingua franca par excellence, however, Tok Pisin seems to have obviated the need for multilingualism.

That said, the two neighbouring languages that Pondis most commonly report to have some familiarity with are Kanda and Ap Ma. This is unsurprising, considering the much greater size and influence of these two languages: Kanda is spoken in 22 villages, reportedly by 8,220 people (Eberhard et al. 2020, citing ‘2003 SIL’); and Ap Ma is spoken in 15 villages, reportedly by 10,000 people (Eberhard et al. 2020, citing ‘2010 PBT’). While no Pondi speakers seem to know more than just a few words in Mwakai or Ulwa (Pondi’s two closest sister languages), people are aware of the similarities among these three languages and enjoy pointing out cognates.

Given the presumably long period of cultural dominance of the Kanda and Ap Ma people, we would expect at least some amount of lexical borrowing in Pondi (if not also structural changes caused by prolonged contact and areal diffusion of features). Perhaps in part due to the paucity of lexical data available for these languages, however, it is not particularly easy to find many obvious borrowings. Still, there are a few forms that stick out. From Kanda, Pondi seems to have borrowed words for ‘fishing net’ (*yuwali* < Kanda *yuwali*) and ‘string bag’ (*mandin* < Kanda *mandim*).² The directionality of borrowing is, in both cases, most likely to be from Kanda to Pondi (and not vice versa), both because this accords with the

2 The Kanda forms presented here are taken from my fieldwork with the Maramba dialect. Until its 21st edition, *Ethnologue* erroneously classified this Kanda dialect as its own language (‘Maramba’ [myd], supposedly belonging to the Yuat family). The people of Maramba village, however, speak Kanda (of the Lower Sepik family), and the ISO code [myd] has been retired.

sociolinguistic context of the Kanda speakers being culturally dominant and—more importantly—because the Pondi forms are not cognate with their Ulwa or Mwakai³ equivalents. The suppletive non-plural form of the word ‘dog’ (*ndindi*, §3.11) likely comes from Kanda *ndanda* ‘dog’.⁴

The only possible loan from Ap Ma with which I am familiar is Pondi *momwi* ‘grandmother’, which may be from Ap Ma *mom* ‘old woman’ (presumably with the Pondi suffix *-wi* ‘-like’, §5.1.2).⁵

There may also be some loans from Mwakai or Ulwa, but—given the genetic relation among the three languages and the often-uncertain sound changes that have produced reflexes of proto-words—it is not at all a simple task discerning language-family-internal borrowings from lexemes inherited from the proto-language.

Finally, the Pondi lexicon contains some words that have certainly been borrowed, but it is impossible to discern whence exactly, since they are words that have diffused (sometimes widely) through the region. A word for ‘axe’ (or other cutting tool, but generally referring to a metal implement, not a stone tool) seems to have diffused through the immediate area, for example. In Pondi, the word for ‘(metal) axe’ is *sanglama*. In nearby (related) Mwakai, we find the term *sangilama*, and in the Maruat-Dimiri-Yaul dialect of Ulwa: *sakanma*. The Manu dialect of Ulwa does not use anything similar for ‘axe’ per se, but does have *sakima* as ‘adze (for carving canoes)’. The Magendo dialect of Kanda has *sakarima* ‘axe’, and Mundukumo has *sakanma* ‘axe’.

A term for ‘tobacco’ seems to have diffused over an even greater geographical expanse. In Pondi, ‘tobacco’ is *sakwe*, a form that is very similar to words for this plant in many languages of the Sepik and even into the Highlands of New Guinea. Pondi’s sister languages exhibit the words *sokoy* (Ulwa), *soke* (Mwakai), *soka* (Ap Ma), and *tfukwe* (Ambakich) for ‘tobacco’, but it is unlikely that there was a proto-Keram word for ‘tobacco’, unless the proto-language was still spoken at the time of the plant’s introduction to the region. Pondi’s neighbouring (unrelated) languages exhibit the following words for ‘tobacco’: *sokwe* (Kanda) and *sakwe* (Mundukumo).

3 In the case of ‘string bag’, however, whereas Ulwa has the non-cognate form *ani* (Manu dialect) or *ali* (Maruat-Dimiri-Yaul dialect), Mwakai does have a similar-looking form, *mandapa* ‘string bag’, but this, too, seems to have been borrowed from Kanda.

4 This Kanda form is taken from the Magendo dialect.

5 The Ap Ma form is from the Yamen dialect.

Indeed, very many languages of New Guinea have similar words for ‘tobacco’: these forms perhaps all derive from Malay *sugeh* or *sogeh* or *sugi* ‘quid (of tobacco ...)’ (Wilkinson 1959:1128).

1.5.6 Variation

Pondi is spoken (and, as far as anyone knows, has always been spoken) in just one small village. Unsurprisingly, there do not seem to be any discernible regional dialects. The Pondi people consider themselves to constitute a single eponymous clan, but this clan can be divided into four traditionally recognised subclans. These subclans are not known to correspond to any distinct linguistic varieties. Rather, the most significant variation found among Pondi speakers is age-determined: older speakers are more fluent. The younger speakers who can and do use some Pondi tend to introduce more words and calques from Tok Pisin.

1.6 Language vitality

Pondi is severely endangered. My impression is that—compared to its two closest sister languages, Mwakai and Ulwa—it is relatively vital, since a greater percentage of the community are speakers and the language appears to be used more commonly. Still, although intergenerational transmission may have continued until a later date here than for Ulwa or Mwakai, it is certainly no longer occurring, nor has it been for the past two decades, as there are no Pondi speakers younger than 20 years old. Therefore, unless there are changes in teaching or acquisition, Pondi is moribund and will most likely not be spoken by anyone in the next century.

The single greatest factor in the decline of Pondi is the linguistic domination of Tok Pisin, the English-based creole that serves as PNG’s lingua franca and is one of the nation’s three official languages. I have been told that there are (or were in 2016) a few monolingual Pondi speakers, but I have not met them and doubt that there are truly any Pondis who do not know any Tok Pisin. As far as I can tell, everyone in the area is fluent in Tok Pisin, and for an increasing number of people, this is becoming their dominant (or only) language. A rapid shift to Tok Pisin is pervasive among the linguistic communities around the lower Sepik River, including Pondi.

In the following subsections, I assess the language’s vitality according to three common metrics: UNESCO’s nine factors (§1.6.1), the EGIDS (§1.6.2), and the LEI (§1.6.3).

1.6.1 UNESCO's nine factors

Based on UNESCO's (2003) framework, Pondi would be considered endangered. Table 1.1 presents Pondi's endangerment status according to each of UNESCO's nine factors.

Table 1.1. Pondi's endangerment according to UNESCO's nine factors.

Factor	Description	Pondi's status
1	Intergenerational language transmission	'definitively endangered' (3)
2	Absolute number of speakers	'at risk'
3	Proportion of speakers within the total population	'severely endangered' (2)
4	Trends in existing language domains	'limited or formal domains' (2)
5	Response to new domains and media	'inactive' (0)
6	Materials for language education and literacy	'no orthography available to the community' (0)
7	Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use	'equal support' (5)
8	Community members' attitudes toward their own language	'most members support language maintenance' (4)
9	Amount and quality of documentation	'fragmentary' (2)

Source: Author's summary, based on UNESCO 2003.

The first six factors are meant to be taken together to indicate the language's vitality. Factor 2 does not have a grade associated with it. Of the remaining five, Pondi averages a grade of 3.2 out of 5.0 (with a lower number indicating greater endangerment).

1.6.2 EGIDS

According to the EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) (Lewis & Simons 2010), Pondi may be assumed to be either 'Level 7: shifting' or 'Level 8a: moribund'. If semi-speakers are admitted into the set of people who 'can' use the language, then 'Level 7' applies ('The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children'). If, however, a higher proficiency in the language is required to qualify one as a speaker, then 'Level 8a' seems more appropriate ('The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older').

1.6.3 LEI

Finally, according to the LEI (Language Endangerment Index) (Lee & Van Way 2016; 2018), Pondi would be classified as ‘severely endangered’, receiving an endangerment score of 64 per cent (‘severely endangered’ = 61–80 per cent, with a higher percentile indicating greater endangerment). The LEI assessment of Pondi is summarised in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Pondi’s endangerment according to the LEI.

	LEI factor	Pondi’s status	Description in LEI	Notes on Pondi
1	Intergenerational transmission	3: endangered	‘Some adults in the community are speakers, but the language is not spoken by children.’	Only older adults tend to be fluent, and there are no children speakers.
2	Absolute number of speakers	3: endangered	‘100–999 speakers’	There are fewer than 300 fluent speakers.
3	Speaker number trends	3: endangered	‘Only about half of community members speak the language. Speaker numbers are decreasing steadily, but not at an accelerated pace.’	While almost half of the community are speakers, absolutely no children are acquiring the language, so numbers <i>will</i> decrease rapidly.
4	Domains of use	4: severely endangered	‘Used mainly just in the home and/or with family, and may not be the primary language even in these domains for many community members.’	Pondi is not used for any wider communication, nor is it the primary language in any domain for any community member.
calculation of factors: $\frac{[(f_1 \times 2) + f_2 + f_3 + f_4]}{\div 25}$		$\frac{[(3 \times 2) + 3 + 3 + 4]}{\div 25} = 64\%$	‘80–61% = Severely Endangered’	Pondi is severely endangered.

Source: Author’s summary based on Lee & Van Way 2016; 2018.

1.7 Classification

Pondİ is a member of the small Ulmapo subgroup, consisting of itself, Mwakai, and Ulwa. There is no precise metric established for determining *just how related* members of a given family are (although it is common to draw impressionistic comparisons such as: ‘as related as the members of Romance’ or ‘as related as the members of Indo-European’, etc.). In case comparisons of so-called basic lexical items can offer any guide, then I can say that Pondİ, Mwakai, and Ulwa each share about 40 per cent cognate vocabulary (of a Swadesh 100-word list) with each of the other two languages. I tentatively propose that Pondİ and Mwakai form a subgroup within Ulmapo, but this classification is, admittedly, based more on a slightly greater number of overall cognates between Mwakai and Pondİ and on innovations in Ulwa, rather than on shared innovations in Mwakai-Pondİ. That is, it is possible that either Ulwa-Mwakai or Ulwa-Pondİ indeed form a legitimate subgroup, only that Ulwa subsequently innovated or borrowed more rapidly.

Generations of contact and horizontal transmission have obscured the historical picture of the languages in the region. Although there are a sufficient number of basic vocabulary items shared by the three languages to establish genetic relation, as well as a few regular sound correspondences, it is nevertheless difficult to find a great number of regular sound correspondences, likely due at least in part to family-internal borrowing.

The Ulmapo subgroup belongs to the Keram family (Usher n.d.), which consists of Ulmapo as well as two other languages, Ap Ma (also known as Kambot or Botin [kbx, apma1241]) and Ambakich (also known as Aion [aew, amba1269]). These latter two languages may form an East Keram subgroup, although the evidence for this is less clear than for the Ulmapo branch. The relationships between Ulmapo and either Ap Ma or Ambakich are deeper and therefore weaker. Again, if basic vocabulary can be any guide, then we can say that, of a Swadesh 100-word list, Ulmapo shares around 30 per cent cognate vocabulary with Ambakich and less than 20 per cent cognate vocabulary with Ap Ma, the most lexically divergent member of the family. Moreover, these cognates are often much more different in phonetic form (as compared to the cognates found within Ulmapo), due to the greater number of sound changes affecting the lexica.

The cognacy of pronouns, deictic markers, suppletive alternations, and bound TAM morphology, however, are strong pieces of evidence for the Keram family. A more detailed discussion of the history and classification of the family is forthcoming, but here it may suffice to present some morphological evidence. Table 1.3 provides the personal pronouns for the Keram family, as well as tentative reconstructions of the proto-forms (all in IPA). For Ulwa and Pondi I present non-subject forms, which I believe better to reflect the most archaic forms in each of these languages. The two contemporary Mwakai dialects (Kaimbal and Mongol) both exhibit great variation in the realisation of personal pronouns. The forms I provide for Mwakai are what I believe to be the oldest forms for that language; they are all attested in the contemporary language, aside from 1PL **an* (the contemporary Kaimbal dialect has *kani* and *kan*, and the contemporary Mongol dialect has *ari*, *ara*, and *ar*).

Table 1.3. Keram pronouns.

	Ulwa	Mwakai	Pondi	Ambakich	Ap Ma	*Keram
1SG	ni	ni	ɲi	ɲi	ɲi	*ni
2SG	u	u	u	mbi	u	*u
3SG	ma	ma	ma	mi	ma	*ma
1PL	an	*an	an	ani	ni	*ani
2PL	un	un	wan	oni	nu	*uni
3PL	ⁿ di	ⁿ də	ⁿ di	ali	li	* ⁿ di

Source: Author's field notes.

The odd-looking 2SG Ambakich form may be compared to a common alternate Ap Ma 2SG form *u^mba*. The 3PL Ambakich and Ap Ma forms with /l/ are probably derived from a proto-Keram plural distal deictic marker (cf. Ulwa *ala*, Mwakai *ara*, and Pondi *ala* ‘those’). Also, Ap Ma has lost most initial syllables in multisyllabic words (apparent throughout the lexicon), thus explaining 1PL *ni* (< **ani*) and 2PL *nu* (< **uni*, or perhaps **unu*).

These forms may be compared with those of some of the nearest languages belonging to different language families (Table 1.4, original orthographies maintained): Mundukumo (also known as Biwat) and Kyenele (also known as Miyak [kql, kyen1243]) (both from the Yuat family) (Foley 2018:227), Kanda (also known as Angoram) and Tabriak (also known as Karawari [tzz, tabr1243]) (both from the Lower Sepik family) (Foley 2005:113),

and Tayap (also known as Taiap or Gapun [gpn, taia1239], an isolate) (Kulick & Terrill 2019:84–85). The Keram forms exhibit no significant similarities to the Yuat, Lower Sepik, or Tayap forms.

Table 1.4. Proto-Keram pronouns compared with non-cognate forms.

	*Keram	Mundukumo	Kyenele	Kanda	Tabriak	Tayap
1SG	*ni	ŋə	ŋə	ami	ama	ŋa
2SG	*u	də	də	mi	mi	yu
3SG	*ma	u	u	mɪn	mɪn	ŋgu (F), ŋi (M)
1PL	*ani	i (EXCL), abə (INCL)	ni (EXCL), aba (INCL)	pangir	apia	yim
2PL	*uni	ya	be	ipwe	ipa	yum
3PL	*ndi	wa	vara	pum	mpu	ŋgi

Source: Author's summary, based on Foley 2005, Foley 2018, and Kulick & Terrill 2019.

Table 1.5 (in IPA) provides the singular deictic forms for the members of the Keram family, again with tentative reconstructions.

Table 1.5. Keram deictics.

	Ulwa	Mwakai	Pondi	Ambakich	Ap Ma	*Keram
proximate	ᵑga	ᵑga	ⁿdʒa	ga	ᵑga	*ᵑga
distal	aⁿda	ⁿda	aⁿda	aⁿda	ⁿda	*aⁿda

Source: Author's field notes.

Table 1.6 (in IPA) shows a suppletive alternation between the singular (or non-plural, cf. Chapter 3) and plural forms of the word ‘thing’. The Ap Ma data come from Wade (1984).⁶ Ulwa and Ambakich do not exhibit any number distinction for the word ‘thing’.

Table 1.6. Keram suppletive alternation for the word ‘thing’.

	Ulwa	Mwakai	Pondi	Ambakich	Ap Ma	*Keram
‘thing [SG]’	ⁿdʒi	ⁿdʒi	ⁿdʒin	oⁿdi	ⁿdʒi	*ⁿdʒi
‘thing [PL]’	—	si	se	—	si	*si

Source: Author's field notes and Wade 1984.

⁶ In her original orthography, the singular form of ‘thing’ is <ji>.

Finally, Table 1.7 shows the basic TAM verbal morphology for each of the members of the Keram family. What I identify as ‘perfective’ aspect in the first four languages presented corresponds to what Wade (1984) calls ‘completed’ aspect for Ap Ma. Similarly, what I identify as ‘imperfective’ aspect, Wade calls ‘continuative’ aspect for Ap Ma. The third TAM category, however, which marks irrealis mood in the first four languages, Wade describes as marking ‘incomplete’ aspect. It is likely that the grammatical function of this third proto-suffix has changed over time.

Table 1.7. Keram TAM suffixes.

	Ulwa	Mwakai	Pondi	Ambakich	Ap Ma	*Keram
perfective	-p	-p	-api	-ap	-ap	*-ap[i]
imperfective	-Ø, -e	-Ø, -i	-i	-i, -a	-(V)l	*-V
irrealis	-na	-ra	-la	-l	-la	*-la

Figure 1.1 is a tree depicting what I believe to be the most likely subgroupings of the Keram family.

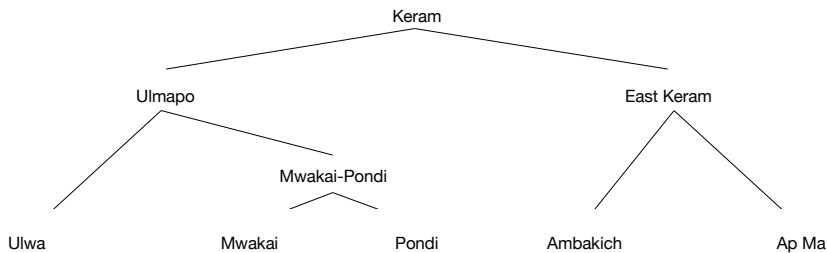


Figure 1.1. The Keram family.

Finally, there is some evidence to suggest that the Keram family of five languages is related to the Ramu family of some 21 to 25 languages spoken to the east of the Keram family, although the details of this genetic affiliation remain to be worked out. I have yet to see any convincing evidence for a genetic relationship between the Ramu family and the Lower Sepik family of six languages.

1.8 Typological overview

Pondİ has a small consonant inventory (13 consonants, §2.1) and an average-sized vowel inventory (6 vowels, §2.2).⁷ Pondİ thus has a ‘moderately low’ consonant-to-vowel ratio of 2.17 (Maddieson 2013c). Pondİ distinguishes plosives in three places of articulation: labial, alveolar, and velar. In each place of articulation, there is a contrast in voicing. All voiced stops are prenasalised (a common feature for the region). The only palatal obstruent is the affricate /ⁿdʒ/. It has no voiceless counterpart (i.e. no */tʃ/ or */ʃ/); the sole fricative in the language, /s/ (which can be realised as [ʃ]), may however be viewed as filling this gap in the consonant inventory. The nasal series matches the four places of the obstruent series, with the exception that there is no phonemic velar nasal (thus: /m, n, ɲ/).⁸ There are no uvular consonants, nor are there glottalised consonants, nor consonants with any other types of secondary manners of articulation. There is one lateral consonant: a voiced alveolar /l/, which, only rarely, may be realised as a rhotic, [ɾ]. The vowel inventory consists of the five standard vowels plus the high central vowel /i/. The two back vowels are rounded; and the two front vowels are unrounded. There are no phonemic nasal vowels. Syllable structure is generally simple. A few consonant clusters are permitted (more so in onsets than in codas), but there are never more than two consecutive consonants in a syllable (§2.3). There is no phonemic tone and no phonemic stress (§2.4).

Pondİ is a mostly analytic (i.e. isolating) language. The word class that nevertheless shows the most inflectional morphology is the verb, which receives TAM suffixes and may also receive prefixes (Chapter 4). Nouns may inflect for number, generally by means of suffixation. Often, however, the alternations between the two numbers are so irregular that it is difficult to discern a single, distinct root to which a plural suffix is attached (Chapter 3). In general, though, it is safe to say that Pondİ is a mostly suffixing (as opposed to prefixing) language. There may be one, marginal, example of infixation, although this is unclear (§5.1.1). There

7 In Maddieson’s (2013a) sample of 562 languages, the average size for a consonant inventory is 22.7. Maddieson (2013b) describes the crosslinguistic average size for a vowel inventory as being ‘just fractionally below 6’.

8 Velar nasals occur phonetically: as part of the prenasalised voiced velar stop and when an underlying alveolar nasal precedes the voiceless velar stop. The palatal nasal [ɲ] has a very limited distribution, and its phonemic status is questionable at best (it is not included among the count of 13 consonants): generally, it can be analysed as a series of two phonemes: /ny/.

are no known processes of suprasegmental modification or reduplication. Suppletion is found both among nouns (§3.11) and among verbs (§4.12). Pondi is more dependent-marking than head-marking: the dependents (objects) in adpositional phrases are marked to reflect their status as grammatical objects (§6.3); and the dependents (possessors) in possessive NPs are marked as such by a suffix (on pronouns) or a possessive determiner (on full NPs) (§6.1.2). Based on an admittedly small sample of verbs, Pondi has an ‘indeterminate’ valence orientation (Nichols et al. 2004), since the correspondences between ‘plain’ and ‘induced’ verbs are generally of the suppletive variety (e.g. the verbs meaning ‘die’ and ‘kill’; ‘burn, catch fire’ and ‘burn, set fire’; and ‘fall’ and ‘drop’ all form pairs of distinct, underived verbs).

Nouns are not marked in any way for person, gender, or case. They do inflect for number, however, exhibiting a highly unusual alternation between a category that encodes ‘one or two’ referents and a category that encodes ‘more than two’ referents (§6.1.1).⁹ Pronouns, however, exhibit a crosslinguistically much more common three-way number contrast: singular vs dual vs plural (§5.2.1). Also, subject NPs and non-subject NPs alike can receive determiners that indicate number (singular, dual, or plural), as well as grammatical relation (§5.3.2). Non-core NPs can be indicated as such by an oblique-marker enclitic (§7.3). Possession is generally marked by a separate possessive modifier, which directly precedes the possessum (§5.2.3). There are no obligatorily possessed nouns, nor is there any grammatical distinction made between alienable and inalienable possession.

The basic paradigm of personal pronouns consists of nine items (in a matrix of three persons and three numbers) (§5.2.1). Overt (albeit slight) formal distinctions between subject and non-subject forms are present in the 2SG, 3SG, and 3PL pronominal forms. There is no distinction between inclusive and exclusive among the first person non-singular forms. Gender is not marked in any way in pronouns, nor are there any politeness distinctions made among pronouns. The same forms that are used as indefinite pronouns are also used as interrogative pronouns (at least those that refer to human referents) (§5.2.5); and the same forms that are used as plural reflexive pronouns are also used as reciprocal pronouns (§5.2.2).

9 For simplicity’s sake, these may be referred to as ‘non-plural’ and ‘plural’, respectively.

Verbs are obligatorily marked for various aspect and mood distinctions by suffixes (§4.1). There is a basic three-way contrast among imperfective, perfective, and irrealis forms. There is no grammatical evidentiality, nor is tense (as opposed to aspect) a major formal feature. Verbs in dependent clauses can be marked to signal simultaneous action with an event in the associated main clause (§4.9), or to signal conditionality (i.e. that the clause to which they belong is the protasis of a conditional sentence) (§4.10). There is a small set of auxiliary verbs. These immediately follow the main verb, which, when followed by such an auxiliary verb, is always marked as irrealis (§6.2.1).

The order of basic constituents is subject-object-verb (SOV) (§7.1). This order is rigid. Oblique phrases either precede or follow the subject, but generally do not follow the object and never follow the verb (i.e. either XSOV or SXOV). Negators follow subjects and precede objects (i.e. S-NEG-O-V). Adpositions always follow their NPs (that is, there are only postpositions, no prepositions). In possessive constructions, the possessor (genitive) precedes the possessum (possessed). Adjectives follow the nouns that they modify. Demonstratives and numerals also follow nouns. Pondi thus conforms very neatly to the typological expectations of OV languages.

Pondi has nominative-accusative morphosyntactic alignment (§7.2). There are no indications of ergativity, whether morphological or syntactic, in any aspect of the grammar. Unlike many Papuan languages, Pondi does not make robust use of serial verb constructions. There are, however, some compound verb constructions, in which a nominal adjunct combines with a semantically weak verb to create a verbal meaning (§6.2.2). Nouns and adjectives can function as predicate complements—always without an overt copula (§6.2.3). Polar questions are formed by applying a rising intonation to a declarative statement, and content questions are formed with the interrogative word in the position expected of its grammatical function in the sentence (i.e. there is no *wh*-movement) (§8.2). Coordination of clauses is mostly formed paratactically (§8.1.1); subordination is also often accomplished this way, but may also be formed with medial verb constructions (§8.1.4).

This text is taken from *A Sketch Grammar of Pondi*, by Russell Barlow,
published 2020 by ANU Press, The Australian National University,
Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/SGP.2020.01