Barefoot security: why is it in the region’s interest for fieldworkers and policy wonks to talk more

Nicholas Evans
Wurm Symposium
July 17th 2013
Pater Wilhelm Schmidt – Die Gliederung der australischen Sprachen
World War II: Navajo Code-Talker on Bougainville Island
Wurm, Hale & O’Grady (1966)
The fieldworker life profile

• very long-term engagement (often 50 years or more)
• very local level (e.g. working in a single small village, learning the language, fitting into local social structures)
• role as a two-way conduit between local people and outside world (mediated by knowledge of language, culture)
• local people often use us to express their deep concerns about issues in development, national politics etc
Concerns from Southern New Guinea

• steep, unstable gradients across three very different countries, economies, political systems

• in PNG, major problems of health, educational access, environmental change, such as rainfall regimes (impacting on agriculture) and pollution from the Fly River
Location of TransFly Ecoregion
Semi-permeable border
Bimadbn village
Indonesianisation
Yei village #1: Po
International problems include

• blocked borders
• potential ‘security’ problems include the spread of multi-drug-resistant TB out of PNG
• withdrawal of Australian support for health programs through Torres Strait clinics
• optimistic accounts of Australian aid initiatives like a special TB clinic in Daru and a ‘TB Boat’ look totally unrealistic when viewed from a local angle
Two Visions of Future Borders