

The Languages of the Sawos Region (New Guinea)

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Introduction

The Sawos region is located in the East Sepik District of Papua New Guinea to the north of the Sepik river between 142° 58' and 143° 45' east longitude, from Sengo village in the east to Paiambit village in the west.

The western part of the region was referred to by GLASGOW and LOVING (1964) as comprising the Sepik Plains Language of three dialects. Since their survey covered only the Maprik Sub-District they did not gather materials from the eastern portion of the region.

LAYCOCK (1965: 144) tentatively postulates the "Sawos Language", a member of the Ndu Family. In 1973 (p. 27 f.) he suggests that there may be at least two distinct languages subsumed under Sawos, but is sure that all the villages he lists are speakers of Ndu Family languages. At the time of his writing he did not have access to any language survey of the area.

The term "Sawos" is not originally a linguistic term. It is a Iatmul word used when referring to the people north of the Sepik river with whom they trade. It is not limited to speakers of Ndu Family languages as it is commonly used by Iatmul people at Brugnowi village to refer to the Washkuk (Kwoma) people with whom they trade. It is often used with the possessive pronoun *nina* 'our' implying that each Iatmul village has its own "Sawos".