

2 Introduction

Oksapmin is the name given to the 8,000 people living just west of the Strickland river and south of the Ok Om river in the Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea. It is also the name given to the language they speak. The name was given by the Telefomin people to the west and it means "The bush people of the water." The name is misleading as it suggest that the Oksapmin language is part of the Ok family of languages, which it is not. It is considered a language isolate.

Bimin, an Ok family language, is spoken by the people just to the south of the Oksapmin language area. There is a lot of intermarriage between the Bimin people and the Oksapmins who live in the closer villages to the north. Although most Bimins are bilingual with Oksapmin, usually only the Oksapmin women who are married to Bimin men and live there are bilingual with Bimin.

In the Oksapmin villages nearest Bimin villages, the number of shared words with Bimin is about 17%. In the villages furthest away, the number of shared words is about 13%. It is not easy to determine which words are truly cognates or are due to borrowing.

Oksapmin has two main dialects (see map on page 207). Dialect 1 has only minor changes throughout the dialect. It is spoken by about half of the language group. Dialect 2 is a dialect chain, with differences becoming greater with greater distance between two villages.

Lawrence, Marshall, compiler. 1993. Oksapmin dictionary. Dictionaries of Papua New Guinea, 13. Ukarumpa: Summer Institute of Linguistics. 244 p.