

Open Letter to Ethnologue Editors by Prof. Craig A. Volker (DWU)

As Professor of Linguistic Research at Divine Word University in Papua New Guinea, I must express my disappointment at your recently introduced policy of charging subscription fees for access to Ethnologue.

Ethnologue is a valuable tool to linguists and the general public. For this reason it was chosen to be the ISO standard for language names in the world. I am surely not the only one to wonder how a listing of ISO information can now be available only by paying a private organisation for access.

This will be a particular barrier to those of us in Melanesia. While a fee of US\$10 may seem little to someone in the First World, it is a large amount for someone in Papua New Guinea, especially a student, and even more for someone in neighbouring Indonesian Papua. Even the means of payment is a barrier--very few people in our region, even academics, have credit cards that can be used online.

Your policy sends a sad message to our students-- we want to describe and study your languages, but we will not give you unfettered access to the information we collect. It will become even more difficult to counter the argument we often hear from students that foreign researchers come to Melanesia only to steal our languages and make money from them.

I urge you to reconsider your action and at the very least, to restore free access to Ethnologue to requests originating from developing countries in the Third World.