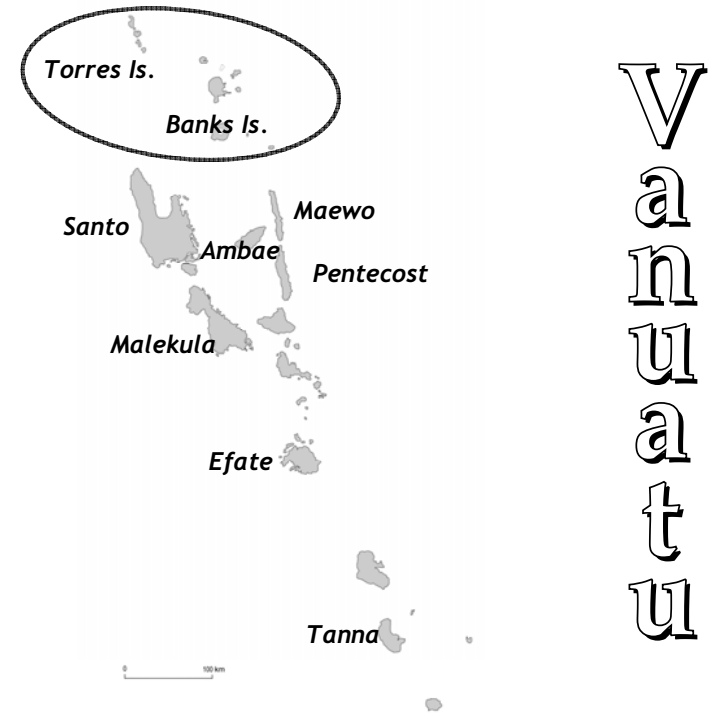


Verbal aspect and personal pronouns

The history of aorist markers in north Vanuatu

5 July 2007 – COOL7, Nouméa



The personal pronouns of Mwotlap

The subject and object clitics of POC have been replaced in Mwotlap with a unique set of **free pronouns**:

	SING	DUAL	TRIAL	PLUR
1 incl		dɔjɔ	dɪtɪl	ɣɪn
1 excl	nɔ	kamjɔ	kamtɪl	kɛmɛm
2	nɪk	kɔmjɔ	kɪmtɪl	kimi
3	kɪ	kɔjɔ	kɪjɪl	kɪj

These pronouns are generally invariant:

- (1) nɔ m-ɛtsas kɪ, kɪ m-ɛtsas nɔ.
1sg PRF-see 3sg 3sg PRF-see 1sg
'I saw her and she saw me.'

A special form for the 1sg pronoun

The 1sg subject pronoun has two forms: **nɔ** vs **nɔk**, depending on the predicate's TAM marking.

- **nɔk** encodes one TAM category, called the **Aorist**

- (2) nɔk [*nɔ] ɣɪm^ɔɪl.
1sg:AO return
'I went back.'

nɔk = '1sg:AO'

- 3sg subjects encode the Aorist with a prefix **ni-**:

- (3) kɪ ni- ɣɪm^ɔɪl.
3sg AO:3sg- return
'He went back.'

ni- = 'AO:3sg'

... and other persons with zero:

- (4) kɔjɔ (Ø-) ɣɪm^ɔɪl.
3du (AO-) return
'They went back.'

Semantic definition of Mwotlap's Aorist

- The Aorist of Mwotlap has a wide **polysemy / polyfunctionality**.
- Five major functions (see François 2003)
 - ▶ **Sequential** actions in sequence, typically in narratives...
 - ▶ **Generic** definitions, procedure descriptions, conditional...
 - ▶ **Subjunctive** required in modality-bound subordinate clauses
 - ▶ **Optative** optative; volitional modality; imperative
 - ▶ **Imperfective** with reduplicated verb: habitual; progressive
- The Aorist construes a **new event** which is **deictically indeterminate** with regard to tense and modality.
 - ▶ Could be called "Indefinite", "Minimal", "Dependent" or "Zero aspect"
- This complex aspect category matches narrowly several cases of **aorist** described for other languages of the world (Wolof; Hausa; Berber; Coptic; Turkish ...)
 - ▶ "Aorist" originally means 'indefinite'
 - ▶ Aspect studies in Benveniste (1966); Culioli (1978); Robert (1996)...

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► Can surrounding languages help understand the unusual morphology of Mwotlap's aorist?

Aorist markers in North Vanuatu

The Quest for the Aorist

- **The six "South Banks" languages**
 - ▶ They possess no single TAM category that encompasses the five basic functions of Mwotlap's Aorist.
 - ▶ The equivalent morphemes resemble neither *nɔk* nor *ni-*.

	MRL	NUM	DRG	KRO	OLR	LKN
Sequential	ti	tɔβ	sɔ		Ø	tɪ
Generic		βε		β-		
Subjunctive	s-	tɛ	s-		(y)a	(y)a
Optative				s-		
Imperfective				tɛ ... ti		

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The 11 northernmost languages possess a genuine "Aorist"

Aorist markers in North Vanuatu

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The Quest for the Aorist

■ The eleven northernmost languages

- ▶ Each language possesses a single TAM category that essentially encompasses the five basic functions of Mwoṭlap's Aorist.
- ▶ The formal coding of the Aorist varies with the person of the subject
- ▶ Forms for 3sg:

3sg	HIW	LTG	LYP	LHI	MTP	VLW	LMG	VRA	VRS	MSN	MTA
<i>Sequential</i>											
<i>Generic</i>											
<i>Subjunctive</i>	nə	ni	n-	n-	ni-	n-	n-	nɛ	ni	ni	ni
<i>Optative</i>											
<i>Imperfective</i>											

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The Quest for the Aorist

■ The three "Central Banks" languages

- ▶ Aorist encoded by a set of clitics or pronoun variation

	1sg	2sg	3sg	non-singular
	'let me see'	'you see'	'let him see'	'let us see'
Mota	(nau) na ilo	(ko) ka ilo	(ni) ni ilo	nina a ilo
Mwesen	na na ɪl	nɪk a ɪl	nɪ ni ɪl	nin a ɪl
Vurës	(nɔ) na ɪl	nɪk i ɪl	nɪ ni ɪl	nɪn a ɪl

- ▶ non-sg: a vowel *a* where Mwoṭlap had \emptyset .
- ▶ 3sg: *ni* 'AO:3sg'.
- ▶ 2sg: a single vowel: *i* ; or *a* < spread of non-sg. MTA *ka* < *ko+a*.
- ▶ 1sg: alternation between pronoun *nɔ* (or *nau*) and Aorist *na*
MTA/VRS *na* < *nau/nɔ* + *a*.

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The Quest for the Aorist

■ The three "Central Banks" languages

- ▶ Aorist encoded by a set of clitics or pronoun variation

	1sg	2sg	3sg	non-singular
Mota	(na)	(ka)	ni	a
Mwesen	(na)	a	ni	a
Vurës	(na)	i	ni	a

- ▶ Extension of non-singular /*a*/ to some singular forms
- ▶ The language with most formal diversity is Vurës.

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The Quest for the Aorist

■ Volow

- ▶ Extinct dialect of Mwoṭlap (1 passive speaker)
- ▶ 1sg pronoun alternation *nɛ/nɛŋ*,
... pointing to a prenasalised stop *[^hg].
- ▶ Too parallel to Mwoṭlap to be really helpful.

	1sg	2sg	3sg	non-singular
	'let me see'	'you see'	'let him see'	'let us see'
Mwoṭlap	(nɔ) nɔk ɛt	nɪk (\emptyset -) ɛt	kɪ ni-ɛt	ɣɪn (\emptyset -) ɛt
Volow	(nɛ) nɛŋ ɛt	nɪŋ (\emptyset -) ɛt	gɪ n-ɛt	ɣɪn (\emptyset -) ɛt

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"Northwest Banks"
languages

Aorist markers in North Vanuatu

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The Quest for the Aorist

- The four "Northwest Banks" languages
 - ▶ 1sg Aorist includes /k/ as in Mwoṭlap *nək*, but this /k/ is a prefix to the verb.
 - ▶ obvious when pronoun and verb are separated:

Mwoṭlap			Vera'a		
<i>nək</i>	sə	βan	nə	sə	k- βan
1sg:AO	PROSP	go	1sg	PROSP	AO:1sg-go
'I want to go.'			'I want to go.'		

- ▶ The same surface form [*nəkβan*] 'let me go' will be parsed /*nək βan*/ in Mwoṭlap, but /*nə k-βan*/ in Vera'a.

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The Quest for the Aorist

- The four "Northwest Banks" languages
 - ▶ Set of Aorist prefixes: *k-* '1sg'; *n(V)-* '3sg'; (Ø-) elsewhere...

	1sg 'let me see'	2sg 'you see'	3sg 'let him see'	non-singular 'let us see'
Löyöp	nə <i>k-et</i>	niŋ (Ø-) <i>et</i>	kɛ <i>n-et</i>	ʝɛn (Ø-) <i>et</i>
Lehali	nə <i>k-et</i>	nek (Ø-) <i>et</i>	kɛ <i>n-et</i>	ʝɛn (Ø-) <i>et</i>
Lemerig	nə <i>k-ʔet</i>	næk (Ø-) <i>ʔet</i>	ti <i>n-ʔet</i>	ʝæt (Ø-) <i>ʔet</i>
Vera'a	nə <i>k-ʔɪn</i>	nikɪ (Ø-) <i>ʔɪn</i>	di <i>nɛ-ʔɪn</i>	ʝidɪ <i>k-ʔɪn</i>
Mwoṭlap	<i>nək et</i>	nik (Ø-) <i>et</i>	kɪ <i>ni-et</i>	ʝɪn (Ø-) <i>et</i>
Volow	<i>neŋ et</i>	nɪŋ (Ø-) <i>et</i>	gɪ <i>n-et</i>	ʝɪn (Ø-) <i>et</i>

- ▶ Historical hypothesis: *nək* < reanalysis of *nə* '1sg' + **k-* 'AO:1sg'

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The Quest for the Aorist

- The two Torres languages

	Hiw		Lo-Toga		
	free pr.	Aor. clitic	free pr.	Aor. clitic	
1sg	nəkə	kə	nekə	kə	
2sg	ikə	wət	nikə	wə	
3sg	ninə	nə	niə	ni	
1in:du	tə ⁹ lə	⁹ lə	ʔor	or	
1ex:du	kama ⁹ lə		kəmər		
2du	kimi ⁹ lə		kəmər		
3du	sə ⁹ lə		hor		
1in:pl	titə	tə	ʝiʔə	ʝə	
1ex:pl	kama	-	kəmɛm		
2pl	kimi	-	kəmi		
3pl	sisə	sə	nihə		

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kə | wət | nə | ...

- A proto-system can be reconstructed for the ancestor of these languages (PNCV, or one of its branches)
- Set of four "Aorist" clitics

kə | wə | ni | yə

k- | Ø | n- | Ø

(nɛŋ) | Ø | n- | Ø

k- | Ø | n- | Ø

(nɔk) | Ø | ni- | Ø

k- | Ø | nɛ | k-

na | ka | ni | a

na | a | ni | a

na | i | ni | a

Aorist markers in North Vanuatu

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...

yə

Ø

Ø

Ø

Ø

k-

a

a

(y)a

(y)a

Aorist markers in North Vanuatu

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nə

ni

3 sg Aorist: *ni

n-

n-

n-

nɛ

ni

ni

ni

ni

ni

ni

Aorist markers in North Vanuatu

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wət

wə

2 sg Aorist: *(w)u? *u?

Ø

Ø

Ø

Ø

Ø

a

a

i

Aorist markers in North Vanuatu

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1 sg Aorist: *gV = *gu ?

Aorist markers in North Vanuatu

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Reconstructing the protosystem

► Set of four clitics combining aspect and person:

*gu | *u | *ni | *(k)a

- *nau gu = βano gu = maturu.
1sg AO:1sg go AO:1sg sleep
 'I went to sleep.' / 'Let me go to sleep!'
- *nigo u = βano u = maturu.
2sg AO:2sg go AO:2sg sleep
 'You went to sleep.' / 'Go to sleep!'
- *nia ni = βano ni = maturu.
3sg AO:3sg go AO:3sg sleep
 'He went to sleep.' / 'Let him go to sleep!'
- *kida (k)a = βano (k)a = maturu.
1inc:pl AO:pl go AO:pl sleep
 'We went to sleep.' / 'Let's go to sleep!'

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Reconstructing the protosystem

► These clitics underwent normal sound change (esp. **vowel reduction**)

protosystem	>	Lemerig
*nau gu = βano.		nœ k- βan.
*nigo u = βano.		næk - βan.
*nia ni = βano.		ti n- βan.
*kida (k)a = βano.		ɣæt - βan.

- **Specific morphological changes**
 - **Mtp + Vlw:** Reanalysis of *nau gu > nək / nɛŋ.
 - **Torres Igs:** nəkə (<*nau gu) was generalised to *all* 1sg functions. Same process of reanalysis for several pronouns.
 - **Central Banks:** Extension of *(k)a to singular persons (> a; ka; na)
 - **Vera'a:** Extension of 1sg k- (<*gu) to all persons...
 - **Vurës:** This may be a key to a non-etymological /k/ found in 3 pronouns: dʊrʊk, kʊmʊrʊk and kɛmɛk (?)

Conclusion

- **Proto-system of four "Aorist" clitics**
 - Set of four clitics {*gu | *u | *ni | *(k)a}
 - Tense-aspect-mood category used typically in **generic, sequential, optative** and **dependent** clauses.
- To **which proto-language** should this system be assigned?
 - Proto North Central Vanuatu? one of its branches?
- What could be its **ultimate historical origin**?
 - **Morphology:** Recalls one of the 2 sets of POc Subject clitics {*ku | *mu | *ña ...} + *ka[i] `1exc:pl'... Genitive / Ergative markers at least for PMP.
 - **Semantics:** (??) Subject clitics restricted to **dependent clauses** > grammaticalised into aorist markers
- This is a starting point for further research, and for future discussions...