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# Verbal aspect and personal pronouns

The history of aorist markers  
in north Vanuatu

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*Torres Is.*

*Banks Is.*

*Santo*                      *Maewo*  
*Amgae*                      *Pentecost*

*Malekula*

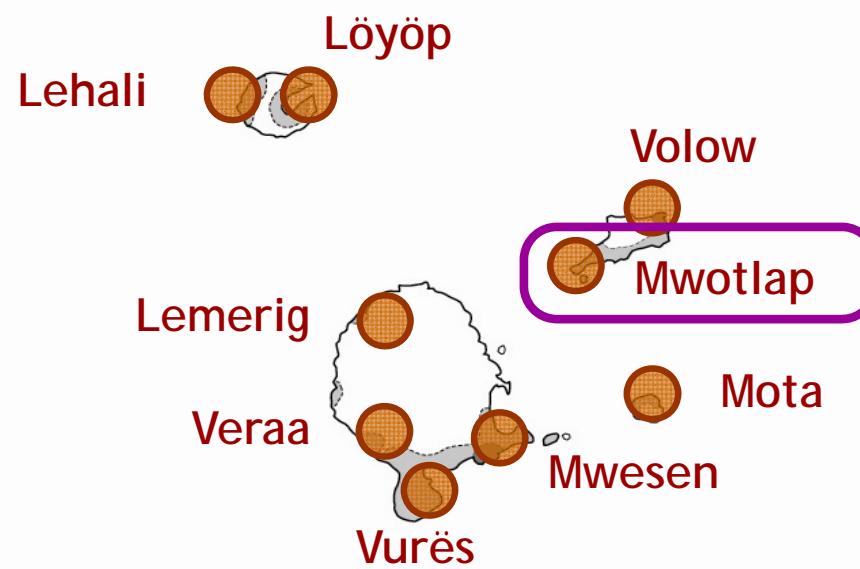
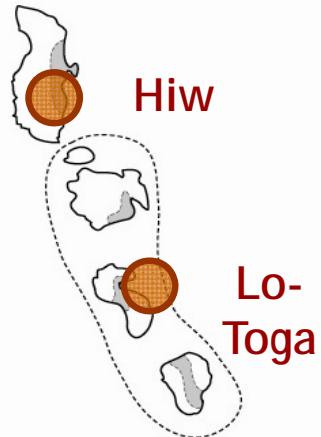
*Efate*

*Tanna*

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# The languages of North Vanuatu



# 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		duju	ditil	γin
1 excl	nɔ	kamju	kamtil	kemem
2	nik	kumju	kimtil	kimi
3	ki	kuju	kijtil	kij

These pronouns are generally invariant:

- (1) **nɔ m-etsas ki, ki m-etsas 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*

(4)	<b>nɔk</b>	[* <b>nɔ</b> ]	$\widehat{\eta m^w} ol.$
	1sg:AO		return
‘I went back.’			

**nɔk** = ‘1sg:AO’

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

(4')	<b>kı</b>	<b>ni-</b>	$\widehat{\eta m^w} ol.$
	3sg	AO:3sg-	return
‘He went back.’			

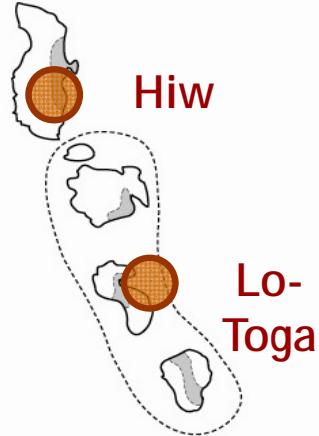
**ni-** = ‘AO:3sg’

... and other persons with *zero*:

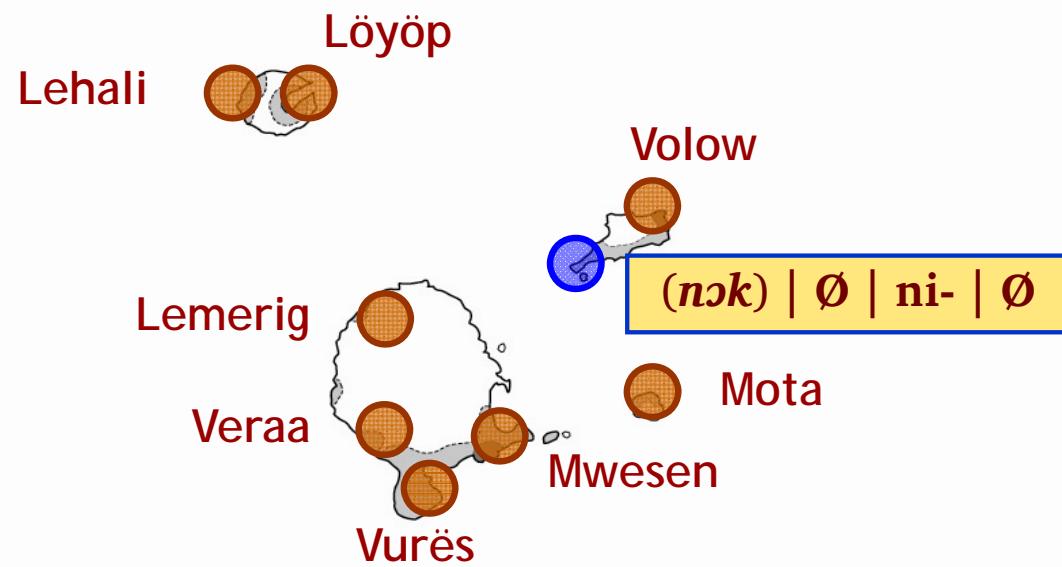
(4')	<b>kujv</b>	<b>(Ø-)</b>	$\widehat{\eta m^w} ol.$
	3du	(AO-)	return
‘They went back.’			

# Semantic definition of Mwotlap's Aorist

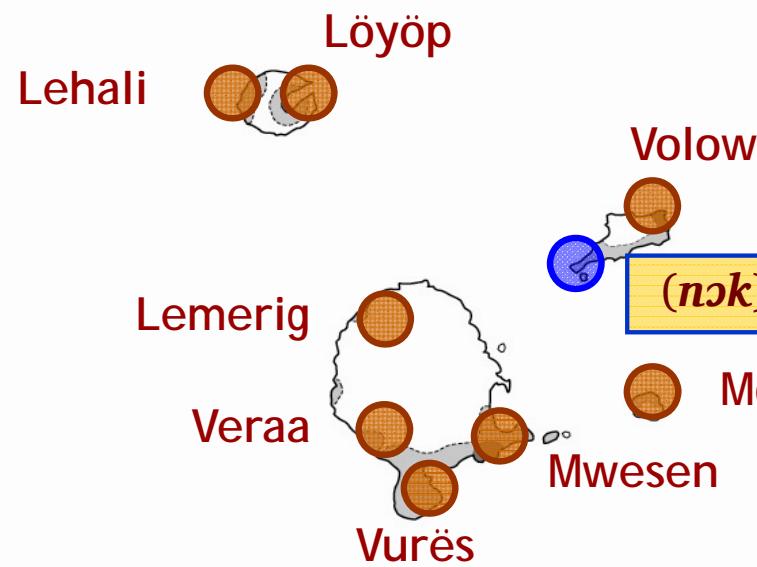
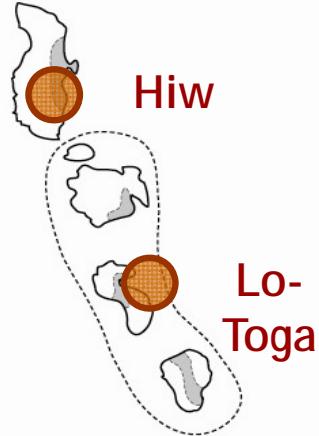
- The Aorist of Mwotlap has a wide **polysemy / polyfunctionality**.
- Five major functions (see François 2003)
  - ▶ **Sequential** actions in sequence, typically in narratives...
  - ▶ **Generic** definitions, procedure descriptions, conditional...
  - ▶ **Subjunctive** required in modality-bound subordinate 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; Anejom...)
  - ▶ "Aorist" originally means '*indefinite*'
  - ▶ Aspect studies in Benveniste (1966); Culicoli (1978); Robert (1996)...



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

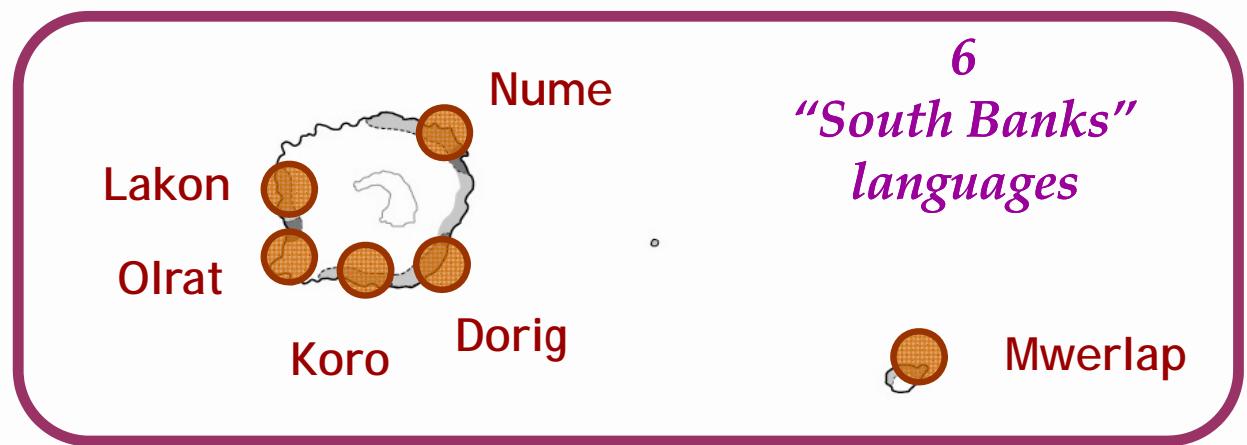


**Aorist markers  
in North Vanuatu**



**(nɔk) | Ø | ni- | Ø**

***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.

?

	<i>MRL</i>	<i>NUM</i>	<i>DRG</i>	<i>KRO</i>	<i>OLR</i>	<i>LKN</i>
<i>Sequential</i>						
<i>Generic</i>						
<i>Subjunctive</i>						
<i>Optative</i>						
<i>Imperfective</i>						

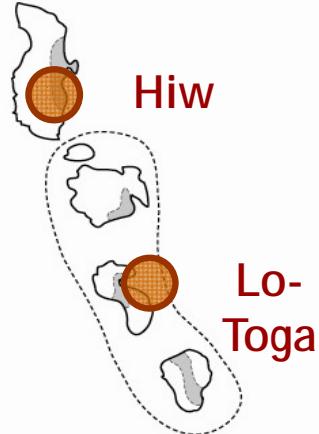
# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ The six “South Banks” languages

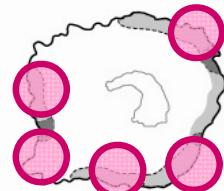
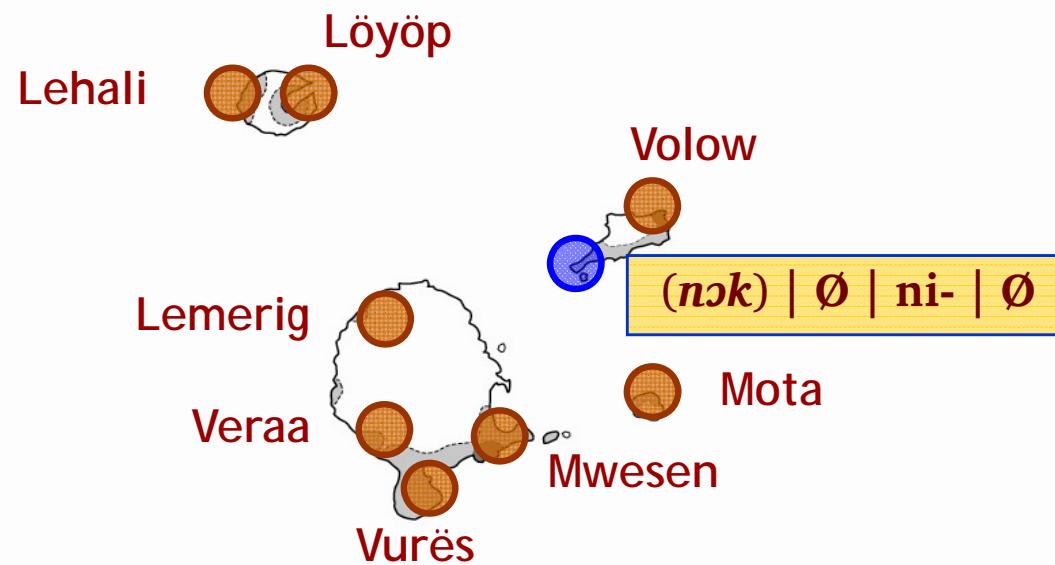
- ▶ They possess no single TAM category that encompasses the five basic functions of Mwotlap's Aorist.
- ▶ The equivalent morphemes resemble neither *nɔk* nor *ni-*.

?

	<i>MRL</i>	<i>NUM</i>	<i>DRG</i>	<i>KRO</i>	<i>OLR</i>	<i>LKN</i>
<i>Sequential</i>	ti	tɔβ	sɔ		Ø	ti
<i>Generic</i>		βε		β-		
<i>Subjunctive</i>	s-	tε	s-		(y)a	(y)a
<i>Optative</i>				s-		
<i>Imperfective</i>		tε ... ti	t-... ti	t-... ti	ti-... ti	ti-... tɔ



The 11 northernmost languages possess a genuine “Aorist”



Aorist markers  
in North Vanuatu

# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ The eleven northernmost languages

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



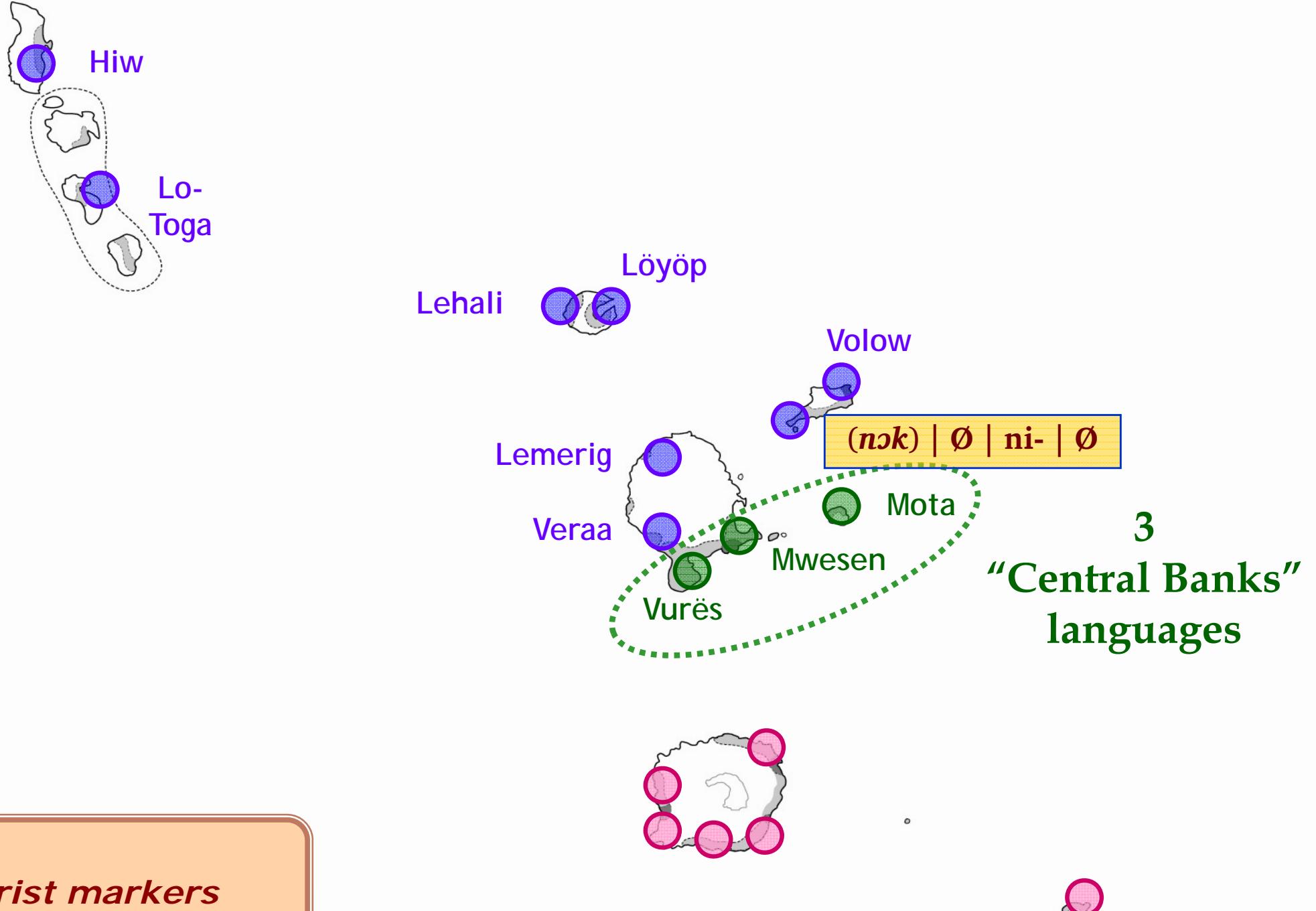
	<i>HIW</i>	<i>LTG</i>	<i>LYP</i>	<i>LHI</i>	<i>MTP</i>	<i>VLW</i>	<i>LMG</i>	<i>VRA</i>	<i>VRS</i>	<i>MSN</i>	<i>MTA</i>
<i>Sequential</i>											
<i>Generic</i>											
<i>Subjunctive</i>											
<i>Optative</i>											
<i>Imperfective</i>											

# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ The eleven northernmost languages

- ▶ Each language possesses a single TAM category that essentially encompasses the five basic functions of Mwotlap'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>nə</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>n-</i>	<i>n-</i>	<i>ni-</i>	<i>n-</i>	<i>n-</i>	<i>nɛ</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>ni</i>



# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ The three “Central Banks” languages

- ▶ Aorist encoded by a set of clitics

	1sg <i>'let me see'</i>	2sg <i>'you see'</i>	3sg <i>'let him see'</i>	non-singular <i>'let us see'</i>
Mota				nina a ilo
Mwesen	na na il	nik a il	ni ni il	nin a il
Vurës		nik i il	ni ni il	nin a il

# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ The three “Central Banks” languages

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

	1sg <i>'let me see'</i>	2sg <i>'you see'</i>	3sg <i>'let him see'</i>	non-singular <i>'let us see'</i>
Mota	(nau) <i>na</i> ilo	(ko) <i>ka</i> ilo	(ni) <i>ni</i> ilo	nina <i>a</i> ilo
Mwesen	<i>na</i> <i>na</i> il	<i>nik</i> <i>a</i> il	<i>ni</i> <i>ni</i> il	<i>nin</i> <i>a</i> il
Vurës	(nɔ) <i>na</i> il	<i>nik</i> <i>i</i> il	<i>ni</i> <i>ni</i> il	<i>nin</i> <i>a</i> il

- non-sg: a vowel *a* where Mwotlap had Ø.
- 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*.

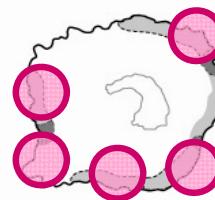
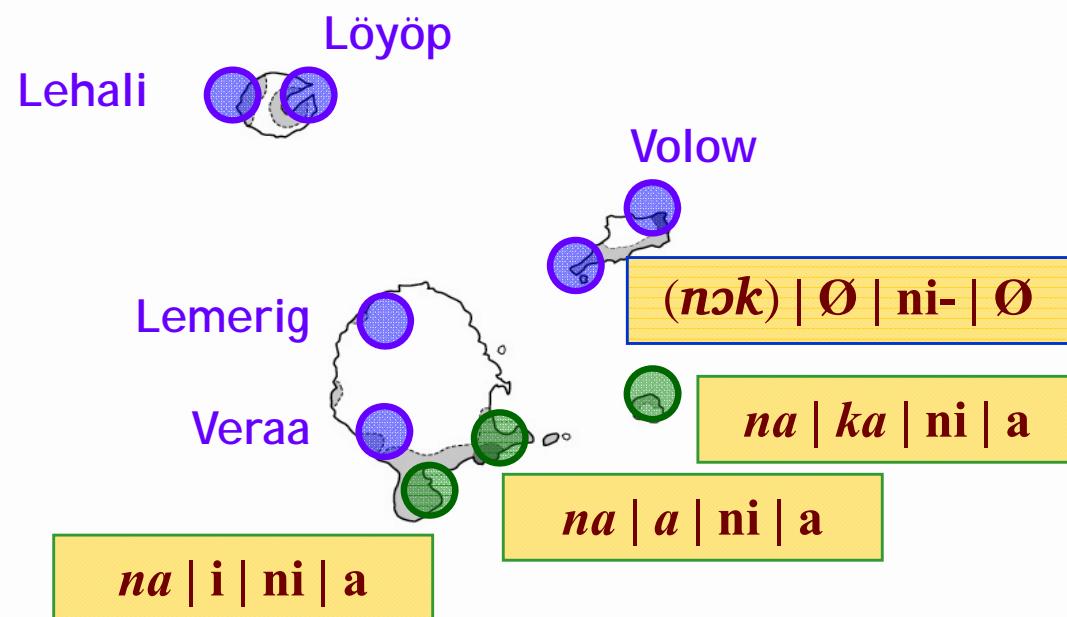
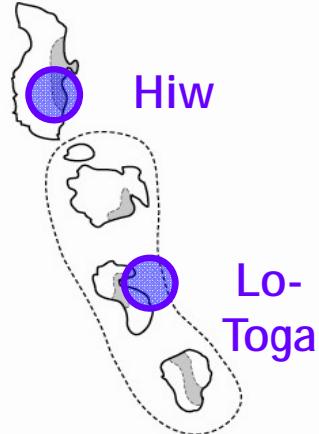
# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ 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.

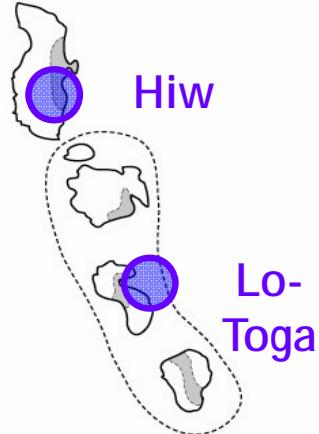


# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ Volow

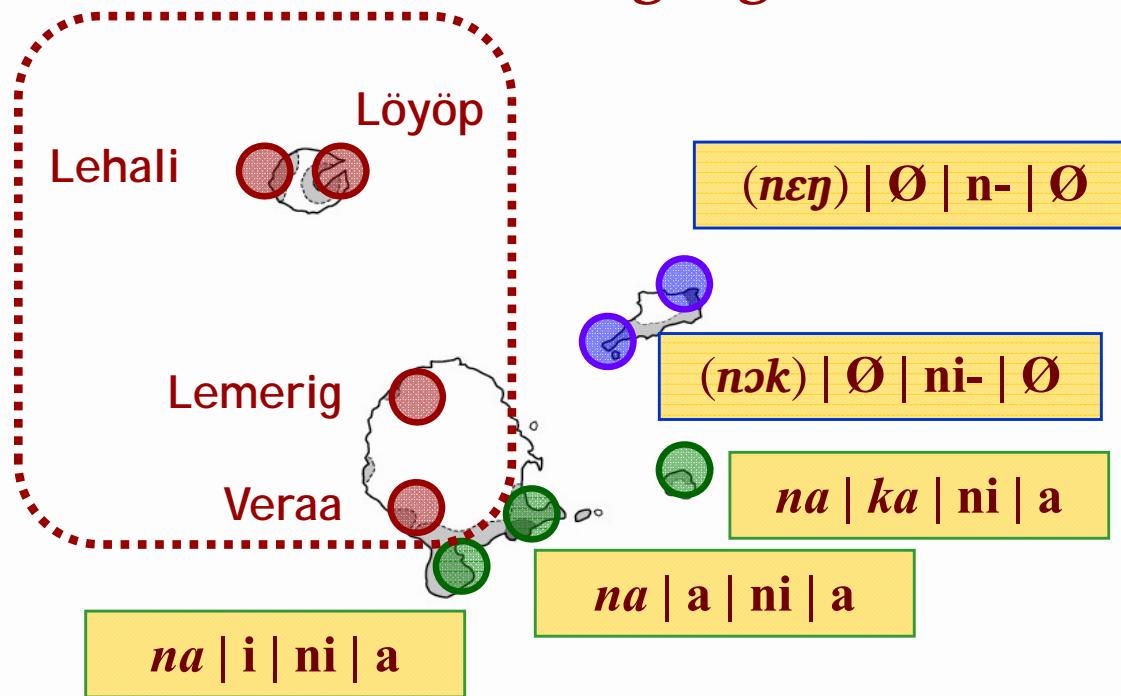
- ▶ Extinct dialect of Mwotlap (1 passive speaker)
- ▶ 1sg pronoun alternation *nɛ/nɛŋ*,  
... pointing to a prenasalised stop \*[<sup>ŋ</sup>g].
- ▶ Too parallel to Mwotlap to be really helpful.

	1sg <i>'let me see'</i>	2sg <i>'you see'</i>	3sg <i>'let him see'</i>	non-singular <i>'let us see'</i>
Mwotlap	(nɔ) <b>nɔk</b> et	nɪk (Ø-) et	kɪ <b>ni</b> -et	yɪn (Ø-) et
Volow	(nɛ) <b>nɛŋ</b> et	nɪŋ (Ø-) et	gɪ <b>n</b> -et	yɪn (Ø-) et

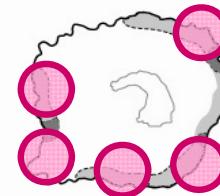


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## “Northwest Banks” languages



*Aorist markers  
in North Vanuatu*



# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ The four “Northwest Banks” languages

- ▶ 1sg Aorist includes /k/ as in Mwotlap **nɔk**, but this /k/ is a prefix to the verb.
- ▶ obvious when pronoun and verb are separated:

Mwotlap	Vera'a
<b>nɔk</b> sɔ      βan 1sg:AO    PROSP    go  ‘I want to go.’	<b>nɔ</b> sɔ <b>k-</b> βan 1sg    PROSP    AO:1sg-go  ‘I want to go.’

- ▶ The same surface form [**nɔkβan**] ‘let me go’ will be parsed /**nɔk** βan/ in Mwotlap, but /**nɔ** **k-**βan/ in Vera'a.

# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ The four “Northwest Banks” languages

- ▶ Set of Aorist prefixes: **k-** '1sg'; **n(V)-** '3sg'; ( $\emptyset$ -) elsewhere...

	1sg <i>'let me see'</i>	2sg <i>'you see'</i>	3sg <i>'let him see'</i>	non-singular <i>'let us see'</i>
Löyöp	nø <b>k-<i>et</i></b>	niŋ ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>et</i>	ke <b>n-<i>et</i></b>	jən ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>et</i>
Lehali	nɔ <b>k-<i>et</i></b>	nek ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>et</i>	ke <b>n-<i>et</i></b>	yen ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>et</i>
Lemerig	nɔ <b>k-?<i>et</i></b>	næk ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>?et</i>	ti <b>n-?<i>et</i></b>	yæt ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>?et</i>
Vera'a	nɔ <b>k-?<i>in</i></b>	niki ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>?in</i>	di <b>nɛ-?<i>in</i></b>	yidi <b>k-?<i>in</i></b>

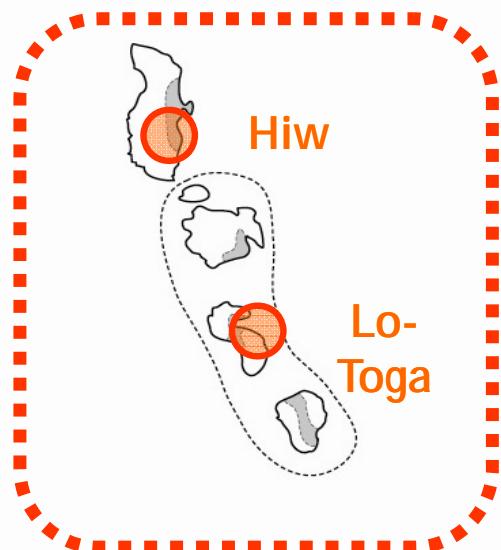
# The Quest for the Aorist

## ■ The four “Northwest Banks” languages

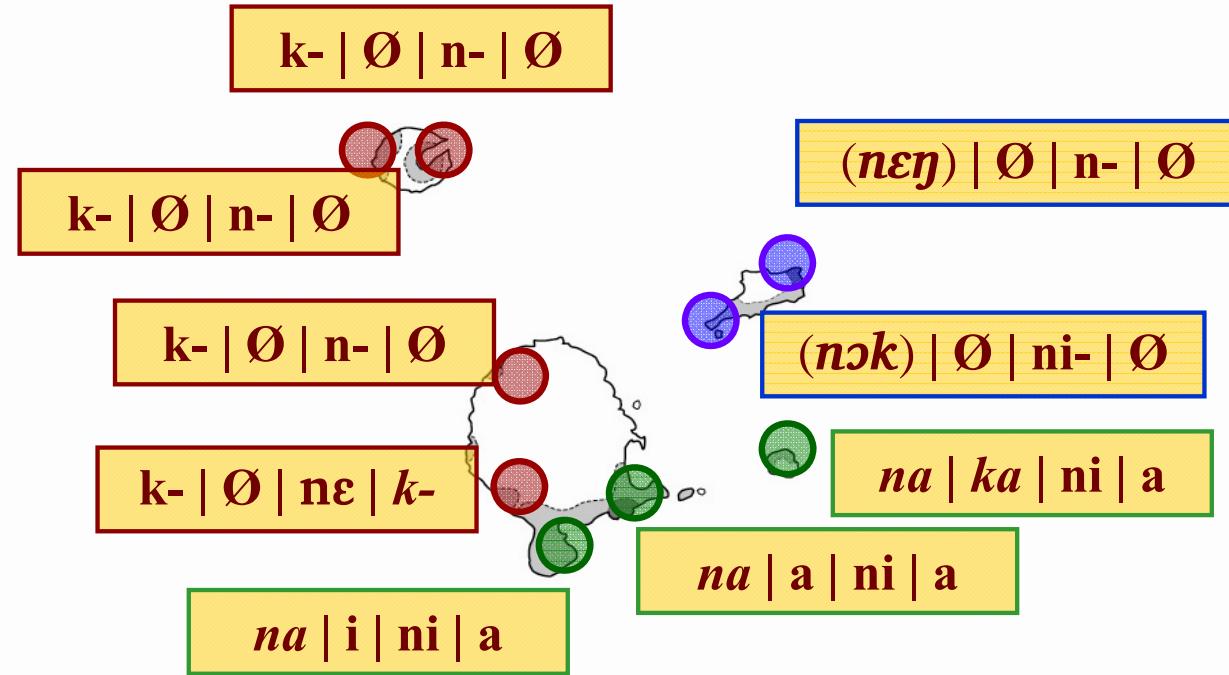
- Set of Aorist prefixes: ***k-*** ‘1sg’; ***n(V)-*** ‘3sg’; ( $\emptyset$ -) elsewhere...

	1sg <i>'let me see'</i>	2sg <i>'you see'</i>	3sg <i>'let him see'</i>	non-singular <i>'let us see'</i>
Löyöp	<b><i>nø k-ət</i></b>	<i>niŋ</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ət</i>	<i>ke n-ət</i>	<i>jən</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ət</i>
Lehali	<b><i>nɔ k-ət</i></b>	<i>nek</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ət</i>	<i>ke n-ət</i>	<i>yen</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ət</i>
Lemerig	<b><i>nɔ k-ʔət</i></b>	<i>næk</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ʔət</i>	<i>ti n-ʔət</i>	<i>yæt</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ʔət</i>
Vera'a	<b><i>nɔ k-ʔɪn</i></b>	<i>niki</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ʔɪn</i>	<i>di nɛ-ʔɪn</i>	<i>yidi k-ʔɪn</i>
Mwotlap	<b><i>nɔk</i> <i>ət</i></b>	<i>nɪk</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ət</i>	<i>ki ni-ət</i>	<i>yɪn</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ət</i>
Volow	<b><i>nɛŋ</i> <i>ət</i></b>	<i>niŋ</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ət</i>	<i>gi n-ət</i>	<i>yɪn</i> ( $\emptyset$ -) <i>ət</i>

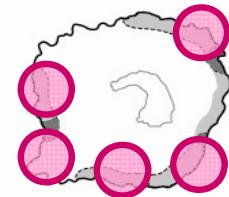
- Historical hypothesis: ***nɔk*** < reanalysis of ***nɔ*** ‘1sg’ + **\*k-** ‘AO:1sg’



## 2 “Torres” languages



*Aorist markers  
in North Vanuatu*



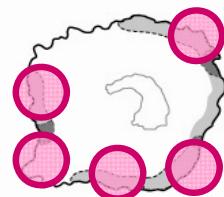
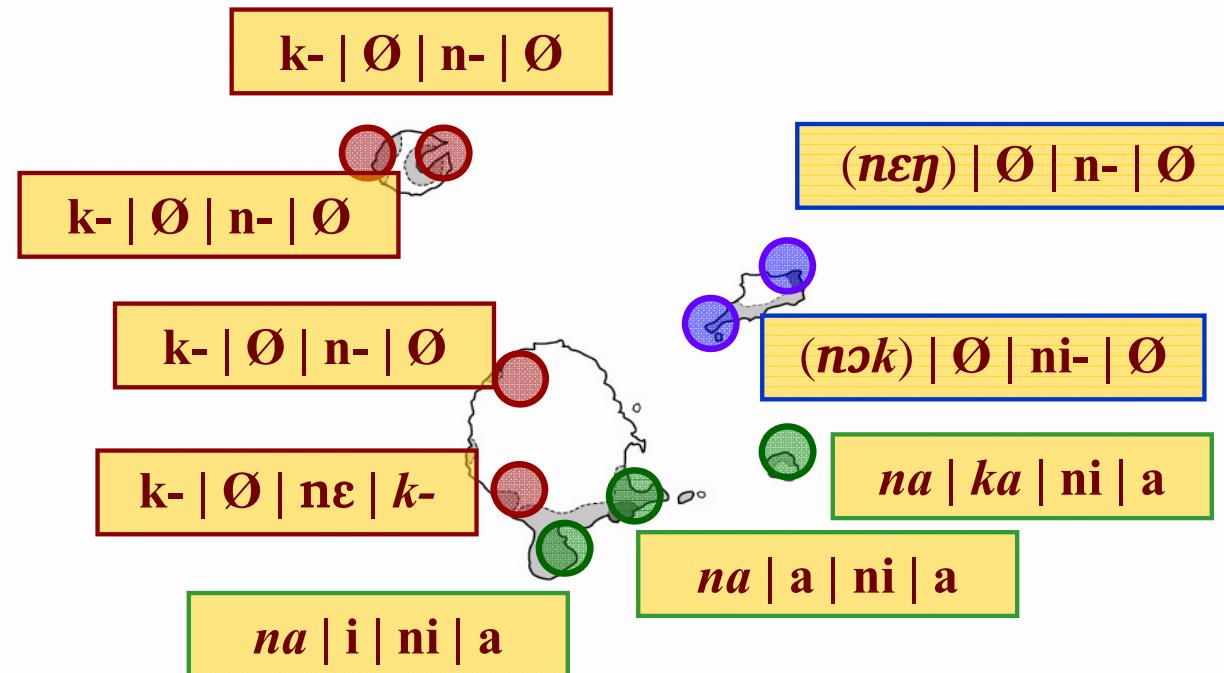
# The Quest for the Aorist

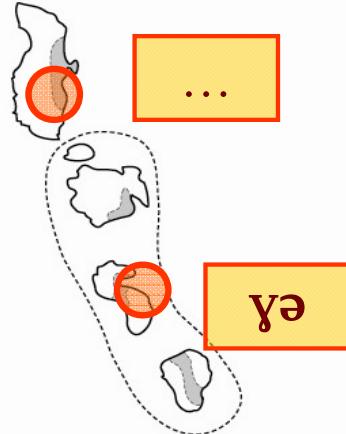
## ■ The two Torres languages

	Hiw		Lo-Toga	
	free pr.	Aor. clitic	free pr.	Aor. clitic
1sg	nɔkə	kə	nɛkə	kə
2sg	ikə	wət	nikə	wə
3sg	ninə	nə	niə	ni
1in:du	tə <sup>g</sup> lə	<sup>g</sup> Lə	ṭor	
1ex:du	kama <sup>g</sup> lə		kəmər	or
2du	kimi <sup>g</sup> lə		kəmor	
3du	sə <sup>g</sup> lə		hor	
1in:pl	titə	tə	ɣitə	ɣə
1ex:pl	kama	-	kəməm	
2pl	kimi	-	kəmi	
3pl	sisə	sə	nihə	

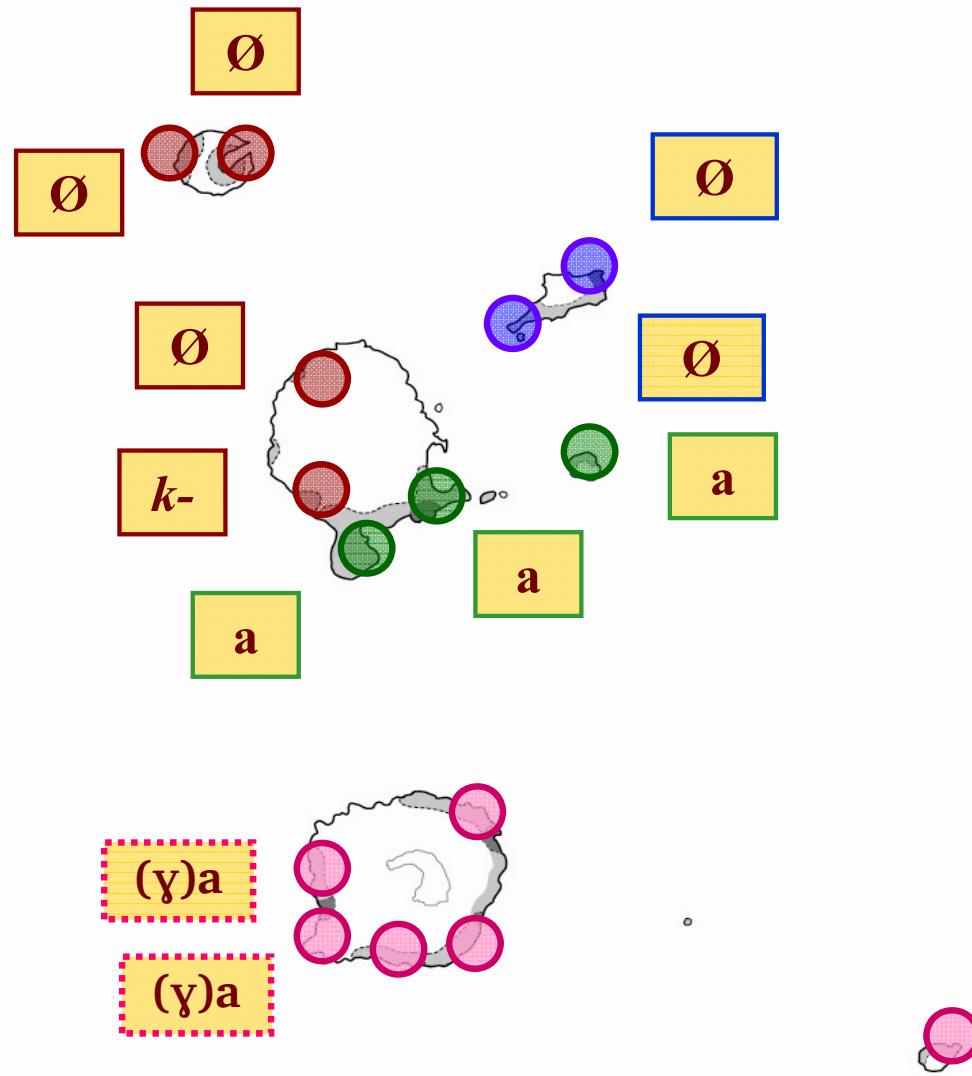
kə | wət | nə | ...

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

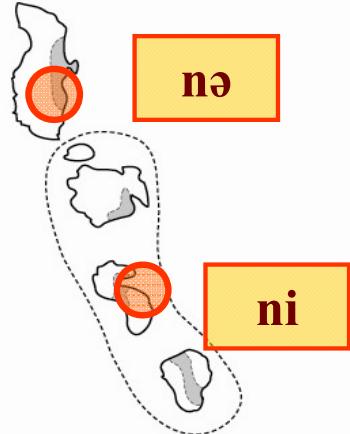




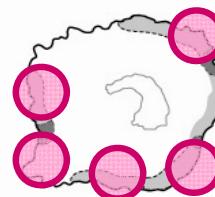
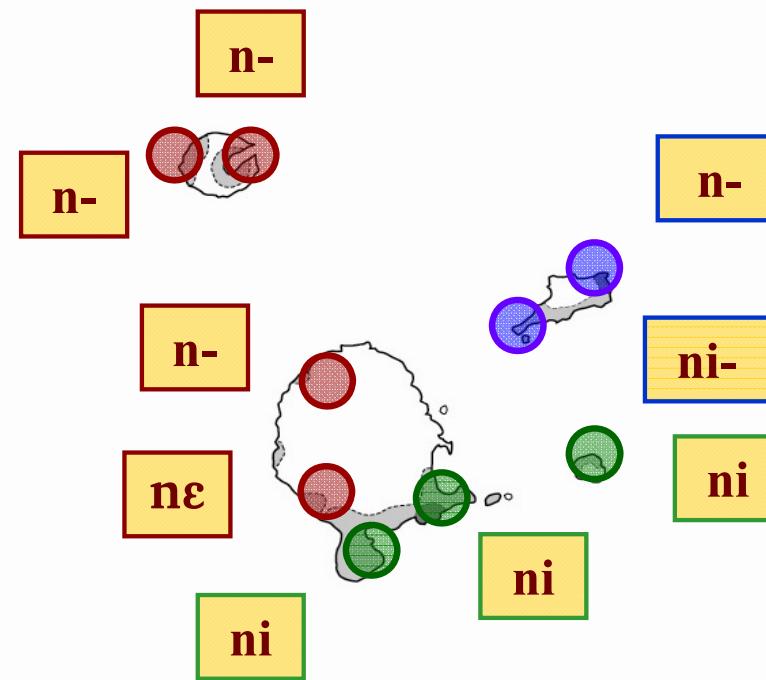
## Non-singular Aorist: \*(k)a



*Aorist markers  
in North Vanuatu*

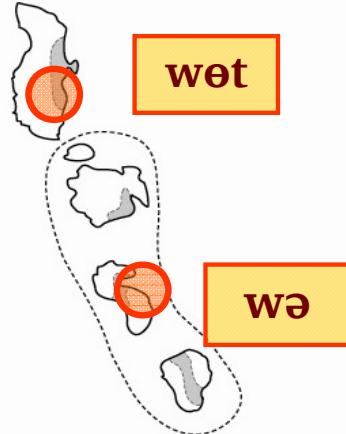


3 sg Aorist: \*ni

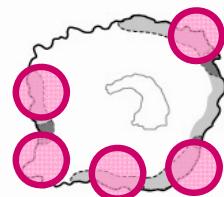
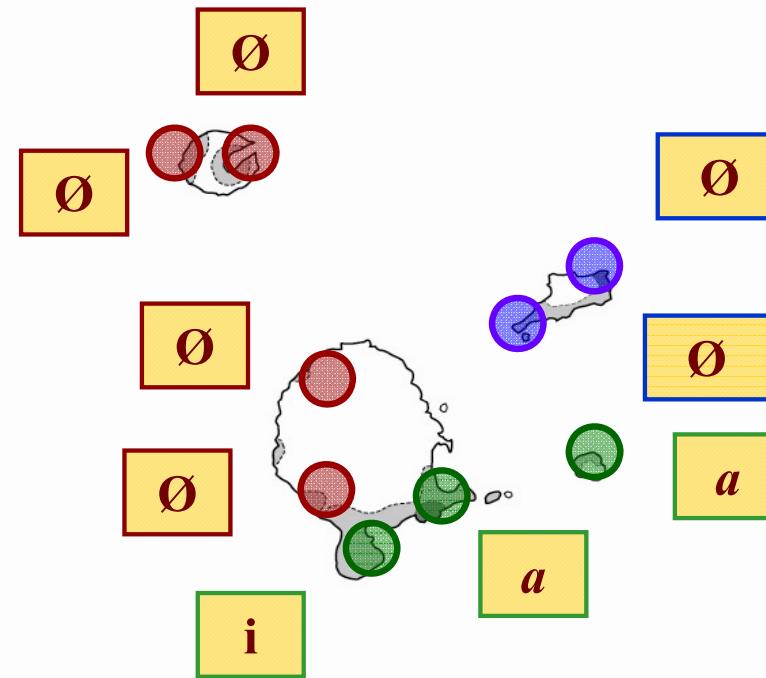


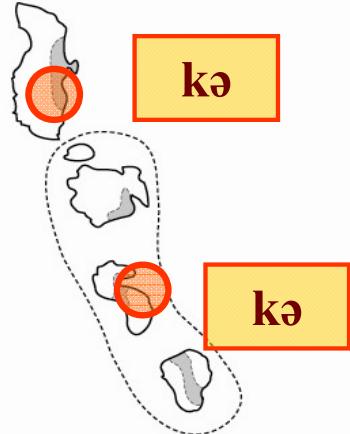
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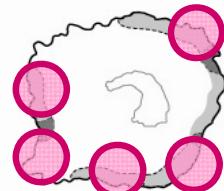
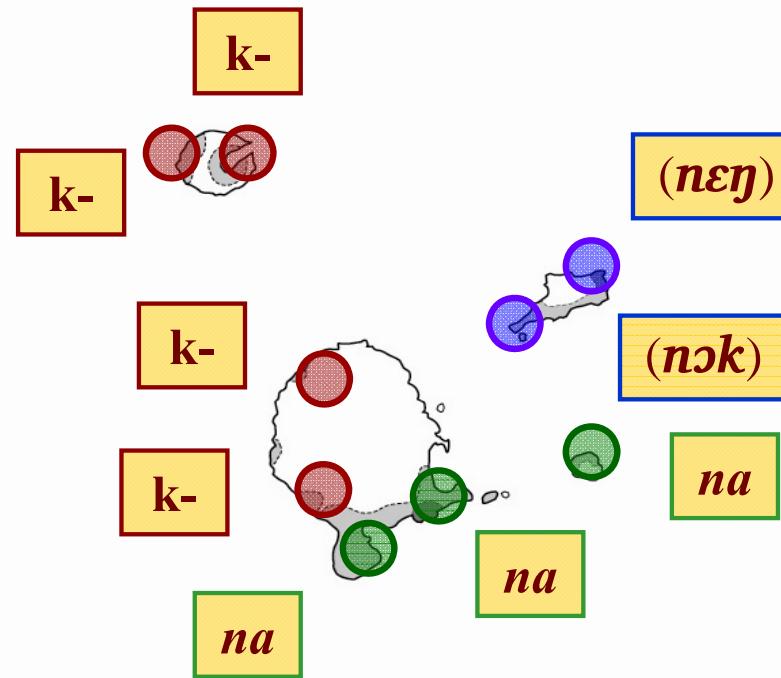


2 sg Aorist: \*(w)u? \*u?





1 sg Aorist: \*gV = \*gu ?



*Tamabo ku '1sg'*



*Aorist markers  
in North Vanuatu*

# 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!’

# Reconstructing the protosystem

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

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

## ■ Specific morphological changes

- ▶ *Mtp + Vlw:* Reanalysis of \*nau *gu* > *nɔk* / *nɛŋ*.  
*nɔkə* (< \*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: durvuk, kumurvuk and kemek (?)

# 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...

# Conclusion

Thanks for your attention.