

Parallel meanings, divergent forms in the north Vanuatu Sprachbund

Diffusion or genetic inheritance?

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Areal studies and language families

■ Linguistic areas

- "A linguistic area is generally taken to be a geographically delimited area including languages **from two or more language families**, sharing significant traits." [Dixon 2001]
- "The central feature of a linguistic area is the existence of structural similarities shared among languages of a geographical area, where usually **some of the languages are genetically unrelated or at least are not all close relatives**." [Campbell 2006]

▶ Most areal studies involve **distinct language families**:

Balkans, Mesoamerica, Ethiopia, SE Asia, India, Siberia...

▶ Another type:

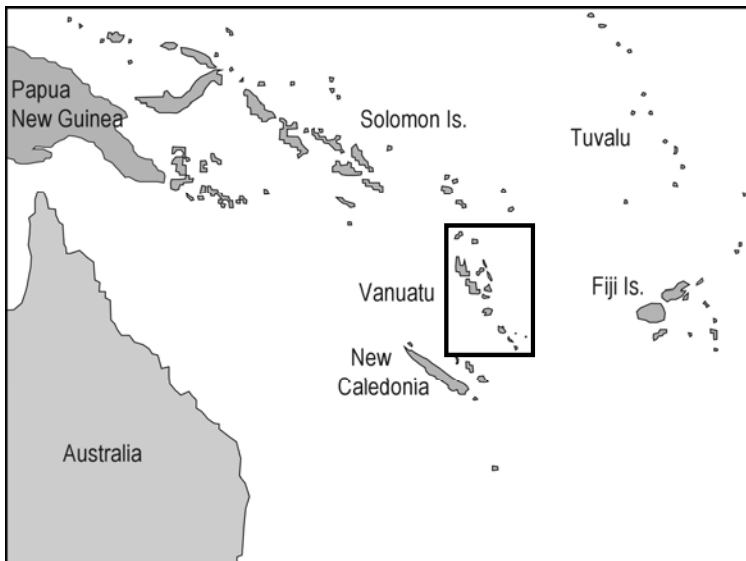
Contact situations involving languages which are **genetically closely related**.

e.g. Heeringa *et al.* 2000 for **Germanic** lgs; Chappell 2001 for **Sinitic** lgs...

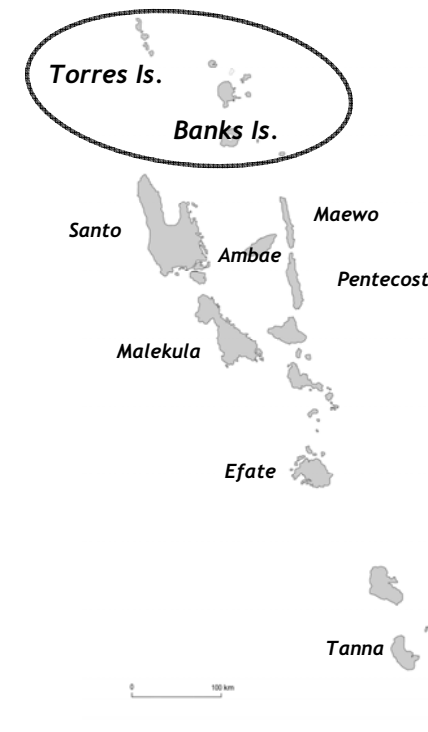
▪ **Structural similarities** < *common ancestor* or *diffusion*?

▶ This case study: the **17 languages of north Vanuatu**.

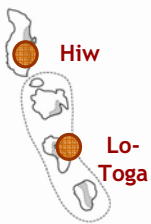
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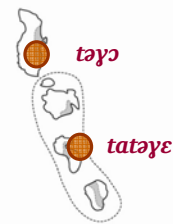
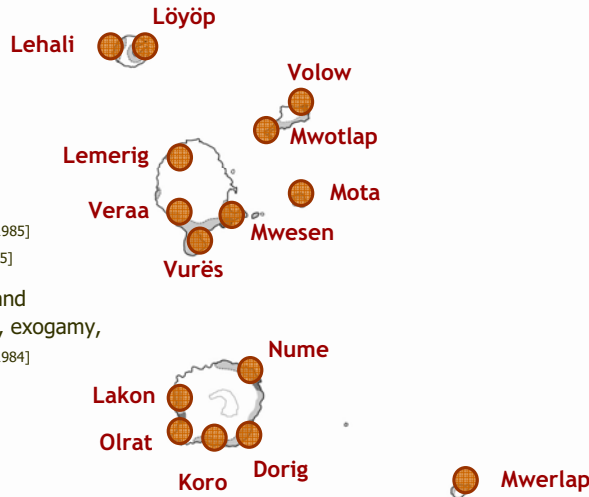


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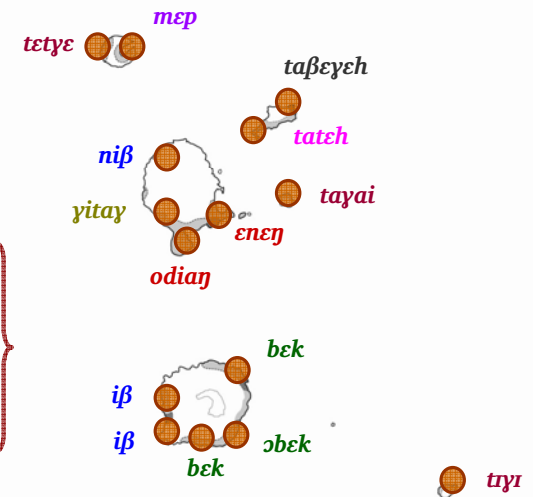
The 17 languages of north Vanuatu

- ▶ **Close genetic relationship**
Austronesian > *Oceanic*
 > *North-Central Vanuatu* [Clark 1985]
 > **North Vanuatu** [François 2005]
- ▶ Sustained **language contact** and **plurilingualism** through trade, exogamy, shared cultural events... [Vienne 1984]
- ▶ Little mutual intelligibility
- ▶ Modern vehicular language:
Bislama (Eng-lexifier pidgin)



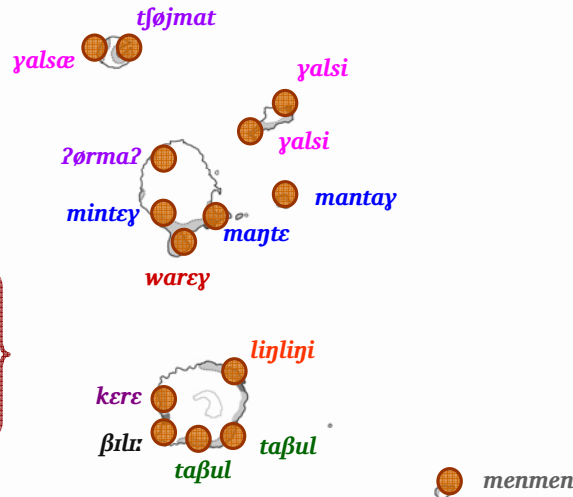
Negative existential

- Negative existential**
- "not be there, be absent"
 - "have not; lack"
 - (sentential) "no"
 - "it's alright"
 - "(try) to no avail"



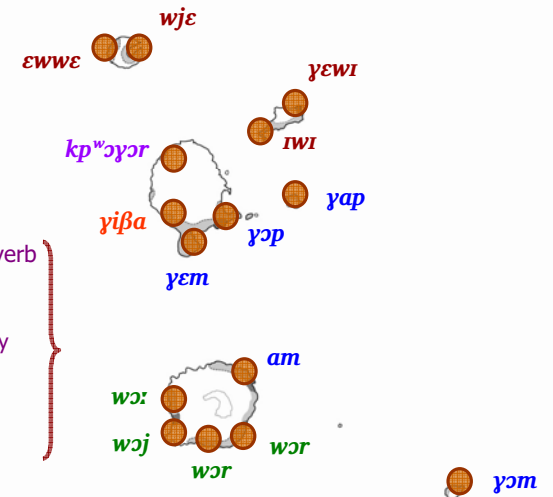
Adverb "properly"

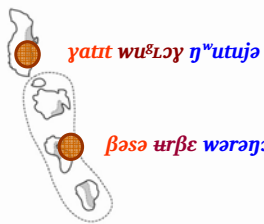
- Adverb **'properly'**
- "(do s.th.) properly, correctly"
 - "(eat, drink+) completely"
 - "(speak) sincerely"
 - "nicely (fat+)..."



Qualitative restrictive adverb

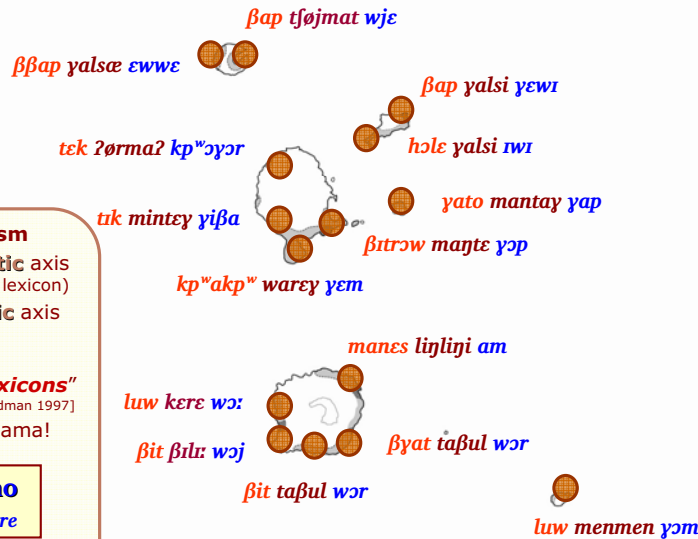
- Qualitative restrictive adverb**
- 'just, only'
 - restrictive with adjectives pragmatically oriented negatively
 - used with small numbers
 - used with recent past
 - 'just (fine)'





"just tell the truth"

speak_V well_{ADV} only_{ADV}



Structural isomorphism

- on the **paradigmatic** axis (semantic structure of lexicon)
- on the **syntagmatic** axis (syntax)

"One grammar, 17 lexicons"
[cf. Friedman 1997]

... or **18** counting Bislama!

BISL **tok gut nomo**
< *talk good no-more

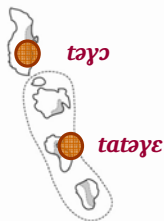
The case of Bislama

■ Bislama

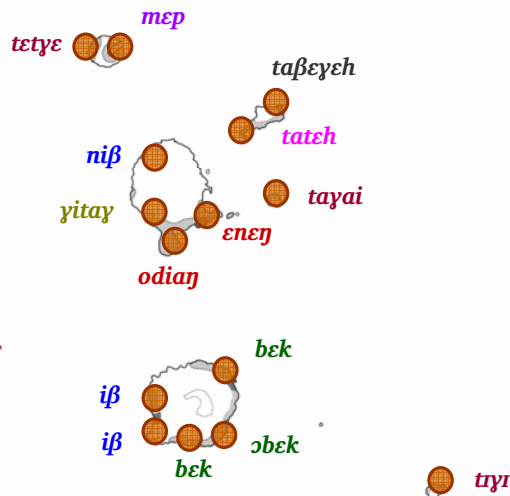
- ▶ English-based **Pidgin** with various Oceanic languages as its substratum (XIXth century) [Tryon & Charpentier 2004]
- ▶ **Bislama** is the Vanuatu variety of Pacific English pidgins. (The variety here discussed is the one spoken in North Vanuatu)

■ Relexification

- ▶ About Haitian Creole, Lefebvre (1998: 9) defines **relexification** as "a process of vocabulary substitution in which **the only information adopted from the target language in the lexical entry is the phonological information**"
- ▶ **Pre-existing functional moulds** (lexemes, constructions...) were re-lexified with "phonological" (formal) material from the lexifier language.
- ▶ Bislama = **Oceanic structures** x **English forms**
[Camden 1979, Keesing 1991]



Negative existential



Negative existential

- "not be there, be absent"
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- "it's alright"
- "(try) to no avail"

BISL **nogat**
< Engl. *no-got

The model of areal convergence

- ▶ Another case where languages with different forms come to share parallel structures:

■ Metatypy

- ▶ Ross (2001) compared **Papuan Waskia** and neighbouring **Oceanic Takia**.
- ▶ As a result of contact, Takia has kept its forms unchanged but has entirely remodelled its structures following the Papuan model.
- ▶ Sustained contact between Igs A and B results typically in A undergoing "**metatypy**" under the influence of B:
 - "the reorganization of the language's semantic patterns and 'ways of saying things'"
 - the restructuring of its syntax."
- ▶ In both cases (relexification & metatypy), contact phenomena are defined by their ability to **disrupt genetic inheritance**.

The model of areal convergence

■ Is areal convergence the right model?

► Oceanic vs (Pidgin) English
(*relexification*)

	Before	After
Forms	different	different
Structures	different	same

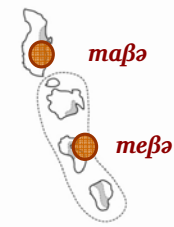
► Papuan vs Oceanic
(*metatypy*)

	Before	After
Forms	different	different
Structures	different	same

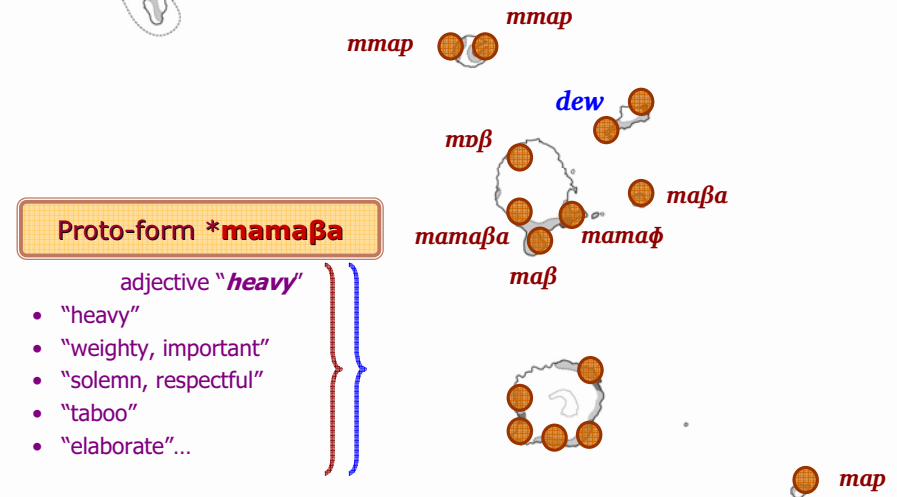
► Oceanic vs Oceanic
(North Vanuatu)

- **forms** have changed
- **structures** have either been retained or changed and reconverged

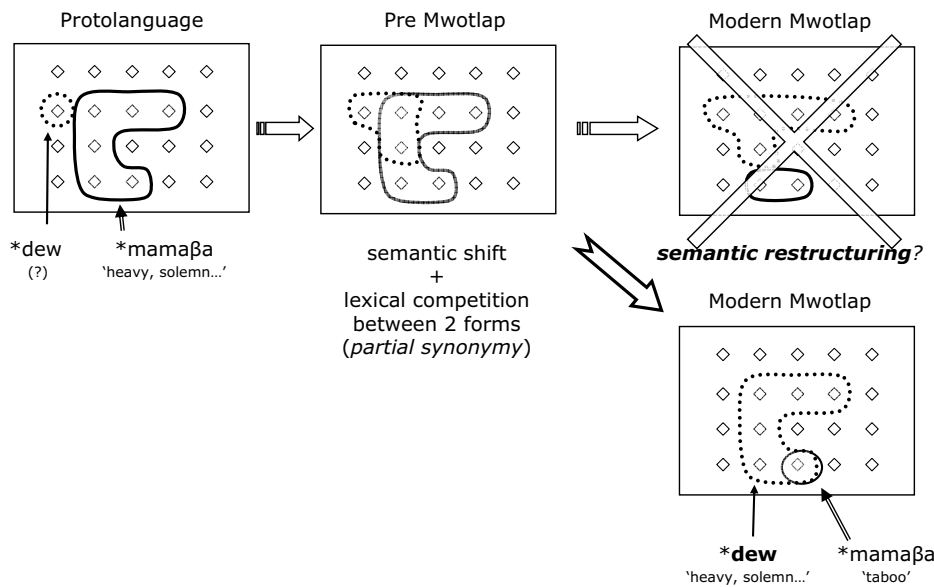
	Protolanguage	History	Present
Forms	same	?	different
Structures	same	?	same



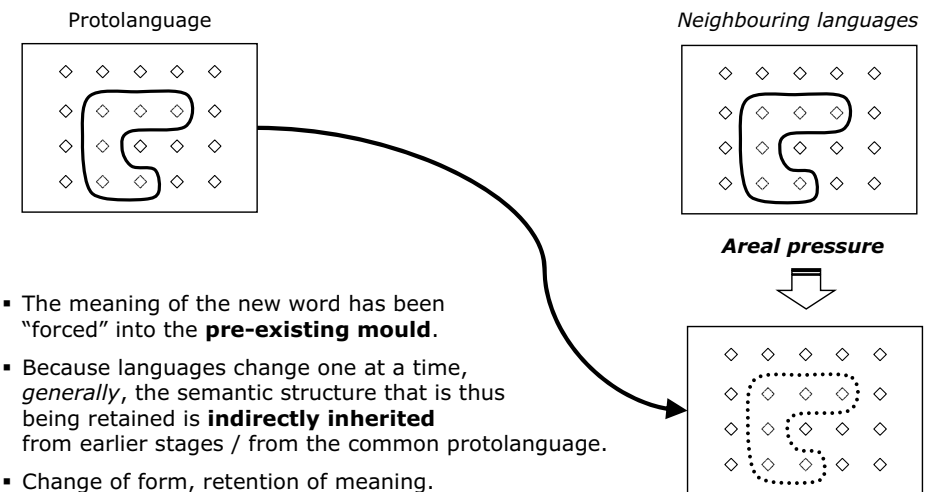
A polysemous term:
"heavy"



Language-internal relexification

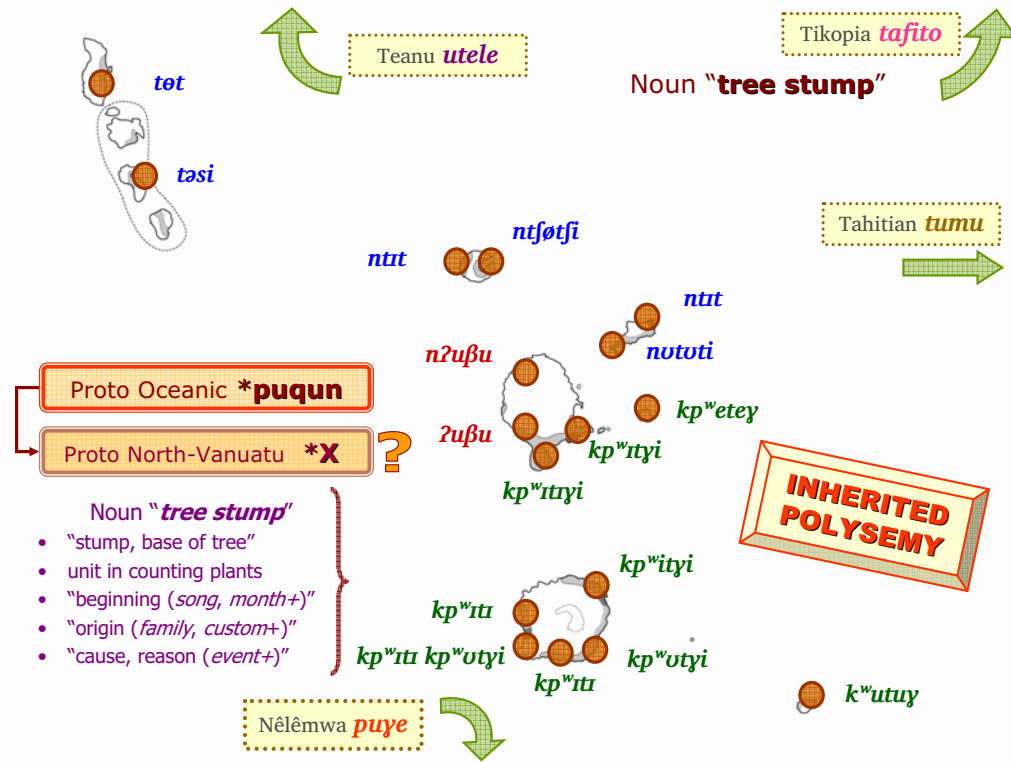


Language-internal relexification



- The meaning of the new word has been "forced" into the **pre-existing mould**.
- Because languages change one at a time, *generally*, the semantic structure that is thus being retained is **indirectly inherited** from earlier stages / from the common protolanguage.
- Change of form, retention of meaning.

► **Hybrid** Micro-perspective: **contact phenomenon**
Macro-perspective: **genetic retention**



Conclusion

- ▶ The paradox of language contact
 - ▶ Language contact is generally observed insofar as it **disrupts genetic inheritance**.
 - ▶ But contact can sometimes act as a **conservative force**: it tends to **preserve original functional patterns** even when **original forms** have long been forgotten.
 - ▶ This **resistance to change** induced by language contact can be of great help to the historical linguist.



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