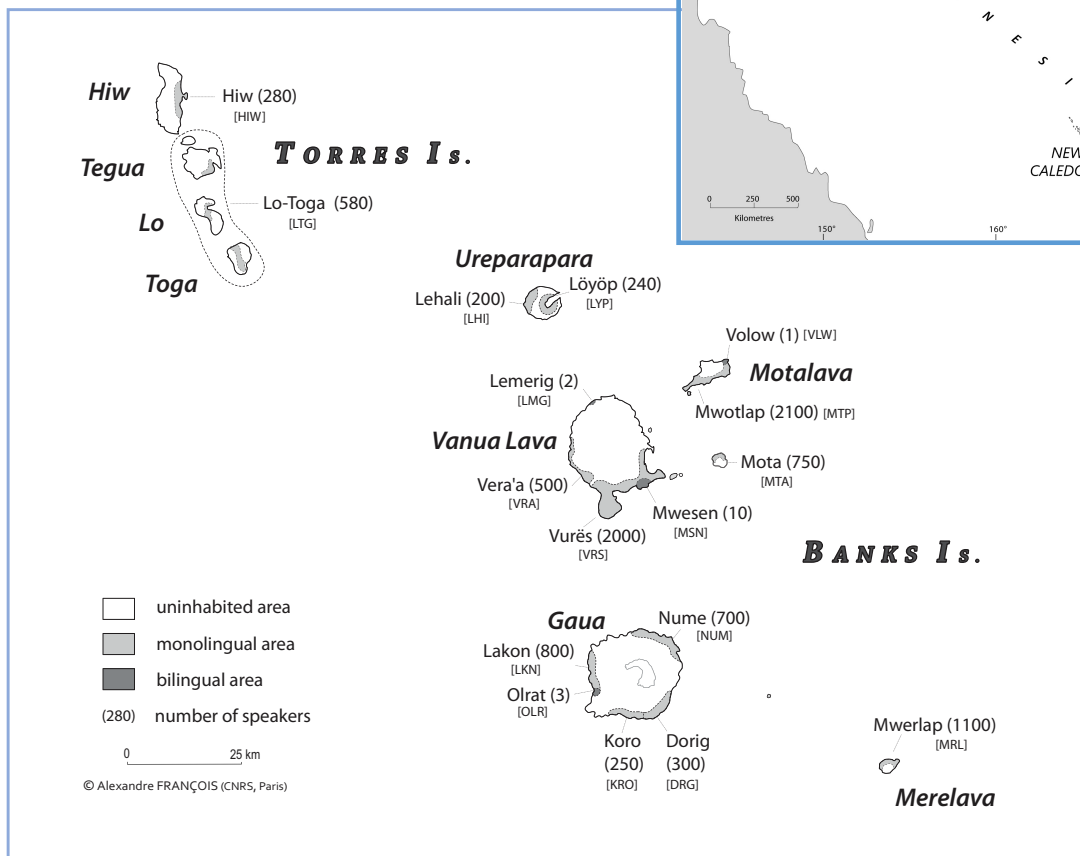
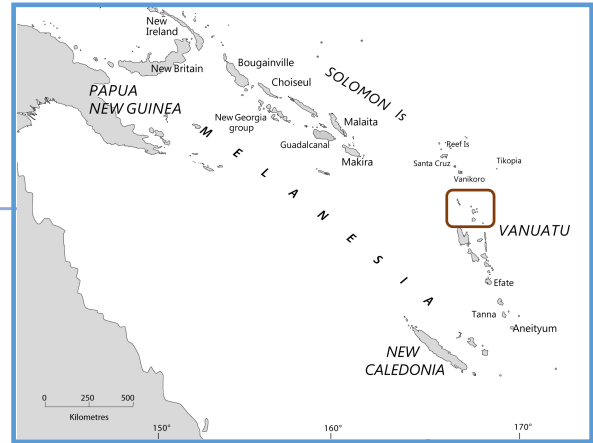


The coding of (in)definiteness in northern Vanuatu

Anaphora, specificity, topicality

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1 Indefinites in northern Vanuatu : the question

1.1 The languages of the Banks & Torres Islands

Banks and Torres Islands, northern Vanuatu : 17 languages, all Oceanic. Their grammatical and semantic structures are generally parallel or “isomorphic” (François 2011)... And yet the organisation of (in)definiteness is quite diverse amongst them.

My corpus : (a) grammatical, comparative questionnaire

(b) recordings of spontaneous speech: 104 h, incl. {50 h = 389 narratives} in 21 languages.

→ Focus on one language: **Hiw**.

¹ This work was first presented in LACITO’s research group *For a linguistic typology of (in)definiteness*, Oct 2015.

1.2 When definiteness is underspecified

The semantic feature [\pm definite] is **encoded** systematically in some languages (Romance, Germanic, Greek, Arabic...) but is left **underspecified** in others (Russian, Mandarin, Japanese...).

DEFINITE expression:

expression construing a referent X with the specific instruction, given to the addressee, to retrieve the identity of that X among the already known (or identifiable) referents of their representational world.

- e.g. *She fell on the road; the children are quiet; I know the harpist*

INDEFINITE expression:

expression construing a referent X with the specific instruction, given to the addressee, to create a new X, without trying to equate it with an already known (or identifiable) referent.

- e.g. *Someone fell on the road; some children are quiet; I know a harpist*

→ Givón (1984: 387-435), Dryer (2014)...

What about the Oceanic languages of northern Vanuatu?

At first glance, the contrast *definite* – *indefinite* is left underspecified:

- (1) Hiw Nine yō : **ne** **meṛēmpē** ōy o me.
 3sg see ART eel crawl out hither
 ‘Suddenly he saw **AN EEL** crawling out to him.’ [Eel_10]

- (2) Tom “**Ne** **meṛēmpē** pe noke meñmeñon ti,
 QUOT ART eel REL 1sg IPFV~feed PAST
ne **meṛēmpē** tayaqe ne megoye piti ie !”
 ART eel become ART child CPLT ADV
 ‘He said: “**THE EEL** I’ve been feeding, **THAT EEL** has now become a boy!”’ [Eel_47]

Languages of northern Vanuatu have a noun article (usually /n(v)/ < POc *na), which is non-specific with respect to definiteness. Its function is that of a determiner, which allows common nouns to form a valid referential phrase. ⇒ article = the D in a ‘DP’ [formal syntax]

The articles of Germanic & Romance languages are really *portmanteau* forms stacking up several functions { DET, \pm DEF, gender, number }... The common noun article of N. Vanuatu lgs has essentially one function, namely DET.

NB: /n(v)/ is only found with COMMON N (all non-human N + some human N)
 ≠ “personal nouns” (=individuated human) take *i or Ø [François 2007]

The /n(v)/ article may read as \pm definite, \pm specific, \pm generic:

- (3) Hiw **NE** TEMĒT tati yō vegyaye tom **NE** TAYÖ giy **NE** TĒN ti.
 ART ghost NEG:R see know COMP ART person dig ART ground PAST
 ‘The ghost didn’t realise that *someone* had been digging *the ground*.’ [Brothers_09]
 [+DEF,+ANAPH] [-DEF,+SPEC] [+DEF,-ANAPH]
- (4) Hiw Tuwtōw, tekñwa tati gengon **NE** TAYÖ ti.
 before HUM:MIX:PL NEG:R HAB~eat ART person PAST
 ‘In the olden days, there was no cannibalism.’
 (lit. ‘... people didn’t eat **A PERSON**’.) [Stories.001] [-DEF,-SPEC,+GEN]

cf. *referentiality scale* (Dryer 2014) :

	anaphoric definites	>	non-anaphoric definites	>	specific indefinites	>	non-specific indefinites
Eng.	the X		the X		a X		a X
Hiw	ne X		ne X		ne X		ne X

In sum, NV languages do not encode definiteness on their articles... But do they encode it at all?

2 Definite and indefinite in Hiw

Nevertheless, some morphemes do exist, that encode such values as $[\pm\text{DEF}]$ or $[\pm\text{SPEC}]$.

2.1 The anaphoric *in*

(5) Hiw Se toge vën vën, ne qin tamesō **ÑOT** mët.
3pl stay:PL DUR DUR ART person old **INDF** die:NPL

Ne qin tamesō **IN** mët : teñwaře ve toge
ART person old **ANAPH** die:NPL HUM:M:PL IPFV stay:PL

ve wane rōg ne mesë.
IPFV drink.kava PREP ART death

‘They were living like that, when one day **AN** old man passed away. As **THAT** man had died, the men of the village came together to drink kava at his wake.’ [Hades.08]

in ANAPHORIC (therefore +DEF): always points to a referent previously mentioned in the context, typically in the preceding clause. ‘that X in question, the aforementioned X’

Origin of **in** = associative noun linker *i* + suffix **-n** ‘3sg:ANAPH’ ⇒ /in/ = ‘of it, its’

(6) ne vegevag’ **i** merēmpē → ne vegevag’ **i-n**
ART story ASSOC eel ART story ASSOC-3sg
‘the story of the eel’ → ‘its story’

⇒ **i-n** grammaticalised as an anaphoric particle **in**:

(7) Ne vegevag’ **in** ppa pe ne.
ART story ANAPH finish FOC DX1
‘So that’s how **THE** STORY ends.’ [Eel_86]

Yet, **in** cannot be used for **non-anaphoric definite** (‘familiarity’, ‘recognition’, ‘uniqueness’) :

(8) Noke peon tō n̄wuye yō vōnyō ([?]**in**).
1sg FUT go:NPL return LOC village ([?]ANAPH)
‘Let me go back to **THE** VILLAGE.’ ([?]... in question)

⇒	anaphoric definites	>	non-anaphoric definites	>	specific indefinites	>	non-specific indefinites
Hiw	ne X		ne X		ne X		ne X
	ne X in						

2.2 Indefiniteness and specificity

Three different indefinite articles in Hiw! → What differences ?

‘an N’: ① *sĕ* N — ② *ne* N *sĕ* — ③ *ne* N *n̄ot*

2.2.1 Non-specific indefinite

The **specific indefinite** construes a unique referent, unknown to the addressee (→ [-DEFINITE]), yet endowed with individual existence. ⇒ **EXTENSIONAL** reading → [+specific]:

She wants to marry A FIREMAN... He’s called Jack and he’s from Dublin.

The **non-specific indefinite** construes a type of referent based on a qualitative property, without entailing the existence of an individual ⇒ **INTENSIONAL** reading → [-specific]:

*She wants to marry A FIREMAN... but she hasn’t found **any** to her taste.*

cf. Givón (1990), Montague (1970), Moltmann (1997), Zimmermann (2001)

❖ Hiw /*sĕ* N/ encodes exclusively **non-specific** indefinites:

- (9) Pavĕn ike yĕaĕ *sĕ* oĕyĕ on kĕge sise on tgĕ.
 then 2sg seek INDF:NSPEC rope SUBJ tie 3pl SUBJ hard
 ‘Then you look for **A STRING** so as to tie them firmly.’ [q.d07.Kenu:11]

Typical of [-SPEC] indefinites (cf. François 2002: 60 sqq.), { *sĕ* N } is incompatible with *realis* declarative clauses (which entail an actual event, and therefore the existence of its participants):

- (10) **Noke tĕwĕriĕ sĕ oĕyĕ piti.*
 1sg find INDF:NSPEC rope CPLT
 *‘I’ve found **A_[-SPEC] STRING**.’

If the sentence is *realis* declarative, an indefinite is normally [+SPEC]. Instead of { *sĕ* N }, the only grammatical construction is { *ne* N *sĕ* } [-DEF +SPEC]:

- (11) *Noke tĕwĕriĕ n’ oĕyĕ sĕ piti.*
 1sg find ART rope INDF:SPEC CPLT
 ‘I’ve found **A_[+SPEC] STRING**.’

A *realis* declarative is only compatible with { *sĕ* N } with verbs that are intrinsically **INTENSIONAL** (e.g. ‘want’, ‘look for’) as they don’t entail the existence of X (cf. Moltmann 1997). → (9) ‘seek’.

The typical context for { *sĕ* N } are predicates which are made semantically intensional through their **MODAL** specifications: conditional clauses, *irrealis* or habitual predicates:

- (12) Tomĕwĕ *sĕ* tayĕ ve yuĕ ton inine, nine tĕ vĕn
 if INDF:NSPEC person IPFV ask ABL 3sg 3sg go:NPL up
 yĕnĕwĕwĕn, tĕwĕriĕ *sĕ* rĕrĕ pe nĕ meĕawe, taĕre suĕ.
 in.bush find INDF:NSPEC tree REL STAT perfect cut down
 [canoe maker] ‘Whenever **SOMEONE_[-SPEC]** asks him, he walks up to the bush, finds **A_[-SPEC] TREE** that fits, and fells it.’ [q.d07.Kenu:02]

Non-specific { *sĕ* N } typically shows up in negative sentences ...

- (13) *Noke tati yĕ sĕ gĕ ti n̄wute pene.*
 1sg NEG:R see INDF:NSPEC thing PAST place DX1
 ‘I didn’t see anything.’ – LIT. I didn’t see **a_[-SPEC] thing** here. [q.d5.Naef:08]

- (13') **Noke* *yō sē* *gē* *ti* *ñwute* *pene*.
 1sg see INDF:NSPEC thing PAST place DX1
 *I saw *a*_[-SPEC] *thing* here.

→ ENG. I didn't see **anything**. ≠ *I saw **anything**.

... or as the subject of a verb of absence (intrinsically negative):

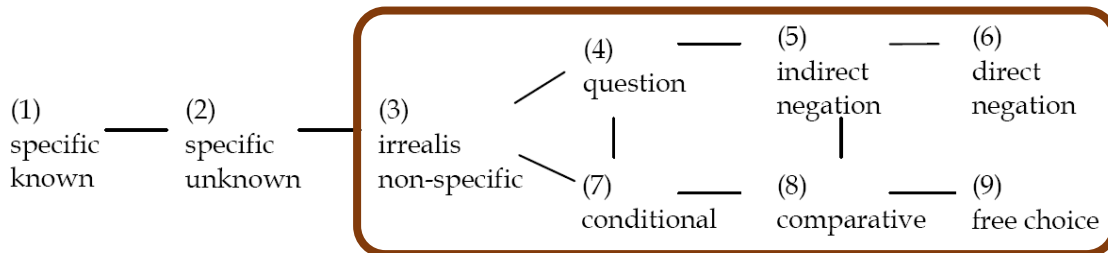
- (14) *Tego, sē* *votwu* *ve* *yēre* *ñwute* *pene*.
 no INDF:NSPEC knife IPFV lack place DX1
 LIT. *A*_[-SPEC] *knife* is lacking here. = 'There is no knife here.' [q.d5.Naef:06]

⇒ see this pair of sentences in a text:

- (15) *Ne tayō sē* *o* *ne* *tēg* *ti* *nēne* !
 ART person INDF:SPEC open ART door PAST DX2
 'SOMEBODY opened this door!' [Grouper_32]
 Declarative realis ⇒ EXTENSIONAL reading → [+specific]

- (16) *Sē* *tayō* *tati* *me* *tō* *me* !
 INDF:NSPEC person NEG:R INTSF go:NPL hither
 'NOBODY came here!' [Grouper_34]
 Negative realis ⇒ INTENSIONAL reading → [-specific]

Cf. semantic map of indefinites (Haspelmath 1997:249) ⇒ Hiw { *sē* N }



It is always possible to underspecify the definiteness status of the NP: {*sē* N = *ne* N}

- (17) *Ne* *tayō* *tati* *me* *tō* *me* !
 ART person NEG:R INTSF go:NPL hither
 'NOBODY came here!' [Grouper_36]

2.2.2 Specific indefinite

If the NP is indefinite [+SPEC], it will normally be encoded by { *ne* N *sē* } – see ex.(11), (15)...

- (18) *Noke* *ñis* *tom* *noke* *vati-k'* *i* *ne* *yekeyake* *sē*.
 1sg want COMP 1sg show-2sg OBL ART dance INDF:SPEC
 'I'd like to teach you *A*_[+SPEC] *DANCE*.' [Music.43]
 ('there is a specific dance I want to teach you')

- (19) *Sise* *tog'* *i* *ne* *metëvönyö* *sē*. *Sise* *to—ge* *toge*:
 3pl stay:PL OBL ART village INDF:SPEC 3pl DUR:stay:PL stay:PL
teñwën *sē* *nine* *tati* *yog*.
 man INDF:SPEC 3sg NEG:R married
 'They lived in *A*_[+SPEC] *VILLAGE*. They lived on and on...
 But (there was) *A*_[+SPEC] *MAN* (who) wasn't married yet.' [Grouper_03]

- (20) Kōñ **sě**, Meṛavtit gatēt ti tekñwa ququy ena...
 day INDf:SPEC M. say DAT HUM:MX:PL friend POSS:3sg
 ‘**ONE**_[+SPEC] DAY, Megravtit said to his friends...’ [Tiyingevuv.007]

⇒	<i>anaphoric definites</i>	<i>non-anaphoric definites</i>	<i>specific indefinites</i>	<i>non-specific indefinites</i>
Hiw	ne X	ne X	ne X	ne X
	ne X in		ne X sě	sě X

Etymology of **sě** [se] < *tje < *tea ‘one’. – compare [vi-se] ‘one’, [jävə-se] ‘six’

2.3 The pragmatic parameter

2.3.1 Discourse topicality

The contrast [±SPECIFIC] belongs to logical semantics:

[±DEF] x is presented as ±**familiar** to the addressee

[±SPEC] x is presented as ±endowed with **extensionality** (existence)

Yet some languages combine these semantic dimensions with PRAGMATIC parameters – particularly, *discourse saliency* or *topicality*:

1. An indefinite may serve to construe a new referent with LOWER TOPICALITY, only once, with no further mention in the subsequent text
2. An indefinite may serve to construe a new referent with HIGHER TOPICALITY, showing more cognitive and discursive *persistence* in the subsequent text

Compare :

1. *Anna seized A SUITCASE, a coat, a hat, and ran out to the train station. [??It was heavy...]*
2. *Anna seized A SUITCASE that had been left there in the corner of the attic. It was an old leather case covered in dust, and surprisingly heavy. She tried to see what was inside, but it was locked. How was she going to open it?*

Givón (1992): “GRAMMAR OF REFERENTIAL COHERENCE” – TOPICALITY

#1 = *unimportant indefinite* ≠ #2 = *important indefinite*

Dryer (2014): #1 = *pragmatically non-specific (but semantically specific) indefinite* [sic]

#2 = *pragmatically specific (and semantically specific) indefinite*

2.3.2 The presentative indefinite

Hiw really has two morphemes coding for INDf:SPEC : {(ne) N **sě**}, but also {(ne) N **ñot**}.

At first sight, **sě** and **ñot** are equivalent... Yet my corpus suggests they differ in TOPICALITY.

1. /**sě**/ usually goes with indefinite referents with LOW TOPICALITY
 { ID:SP:BKG } = *indefinite, specific, BACKGROUND*
2. /**ñot**/ usually goes with indefinite referents with HIGH TOPICALITY
 { ID:SP:TOP } = *indefinite, specific, TOPICAL*

E.g. **ñot** flags the first mention of a new character, which is later central in the text:

- (21) Kōñ **sě**, NE TAMESŌ ÑOT nine tō nine öñwe nōna yōte ti.
 day ID:SP:BKG ART old ID:SP:TOP 3sg go:NPL 3sg weed his garden PAST
 ‘**One** day, **AN OLD MAN** went to work at his garden.’ [Yams_02]

- (22) *Kõñ sĕ,* *NE YEQĚN TAMESŌ ÑOT* mi ne megoye na viřö.
 day ID:SP:BKG ART woman old ID:SP:TOP with ART enfant POSS:3sg deux
 lit. ‘**One** day, **AN** OLD WOMAN with her two children.’ [Brothers_03]
 = ‘Once upon a time, **A** WOMAN had two sons.’

Possible gloss for *ñot* : *indefinite presentative* (INDF:PRSTV)

- (23) *Nĕ řossĕ pe nĕ řossĕ,* *NE TEMĚT eÑOT yaqeyaqe*
 STAT ancient REL STAT ancient ART ghost INDF:PRSTV CONT~appear
ti me METĚVÖNYÖ ÑOT.
 PAST hither village INDF:PRSTV
 ‘A long time ago, **A** GHOST was showing up in **A** VILLAGE.’ [Music_03]

The referent introduced by *ñot* remains salient / persistent in the text:

- (24) *Tameřĕn nine putput vage-řö-on,* *NE YEQĚN TAMESŌ ÑOT*
 moment 3sg sing times-two-ORD ART woman old ID:SP:TOP
řöñ. “Ěi ! Tuwutgĕ !”
 hear EXCL HUM:PAUC
 ‘And as he sang for the second time, he was heard by **AN** OLD WOMAN :
 “Hey, friends !” [she said]...’ [Eel_74]

Sometimes we get a cascade of *ñot* -marked NPs:

- (25) *Kõñ sĕ,* nine tō ti řöw eyo. Tō řöw me,
 day ID:SP:BKG 3sg go:NPL PAST out shore go:NPL out hither
 ‘One day, he walked down to the shore. As he got on the shore,
 → *yō NE QEŘÖÑ PĚ ÑOT ve tu.*
 see ART ditch water ID:SP:TOP IPFV stand
 he discovered **A** CREEK that was flowing there.
 → *Patař’ i ne qeřöñ pĕ in, NE TÖT VOT EÑOT ve sag.*
 close to ART ditch water ANAPH ART CLF:VERTIC stone ID:SP:TOP IPFV sit
 Next to *THAT* creek, **A** ROCK was standing.
 → *Nine sag, ne sag p’ ěne, ne sag ne gengon; (...)*
 3sg sit:NPL 3sg sit:NPL FOC DX1 3sg sit:NPL 3sg eat~INTR
 So he sat there; and as he was sitting, he began to eat [his yam];
 → *ne třog ne gengon ena vĕn yō qeřöñ pĕ, ne yō:*
 3sg throw:PL ART food his thither LOC ditch water 3sg see
 as he was throwing crumbs into the river, he saw:
 ⇒ *NE MERĚMPĚ ōy o me.*
 ART eel crawl out hither
 he saw (**AN**) EEL crawling out to him. [→ex.(1) p.2]
 → *NE MERĚMPĚ, pa nĕ~~~~ kkĕ! Nĕ kkĕ, nĕ kkĕ řĕt!*
 ART eel but STAT small STAT small STAT small INTSF
 (*THAT*) EEL was so~~~~ small!! It was small, so very small!’ [Eel_09]

Lack of *ñot* (cf. ⇒) is surprising, in a story about an eel... Shows that even the category “INDEFINITE, SPECIFIC, TOPICAL” may be left unspecified, i.e. only encoded with article *ne* ‘DET’.

2.4 Synthesis: definiteness marking in Hiw

Definiteness is sometimes underspecified (*ne*), but also sometimes “over-specified”:

⇒	<i>anaphoric definite</i>	<i>non-anaphoric definite</i>	<i>topical, specific indefinite</i>	<i>non-topical specific indefinite</i>	<i>non-specific indefinite</i>
Hiw	<i>ne X</i> <i>ne X in</i>	<i>ne X</i>	<i>ne X</i> <i>ne X ñot</i>	<i>ne X</i> <i>ne X sē</i>	<i>ne X</i> <i>sē X</i>

3 An areal typology

The morphosyntactic categories of Hiw are so specific that they constitute a perfect ‘etic grid’ for analysing an areal typology of definiteness marking in N. Vanuatu languages.

→ see next page

4 Conclusion

The languages of northern Vanuatu can thus contribute in a broader endeavour, namely the TYPOLOGY OF DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES (Dryer 2014: e238) :

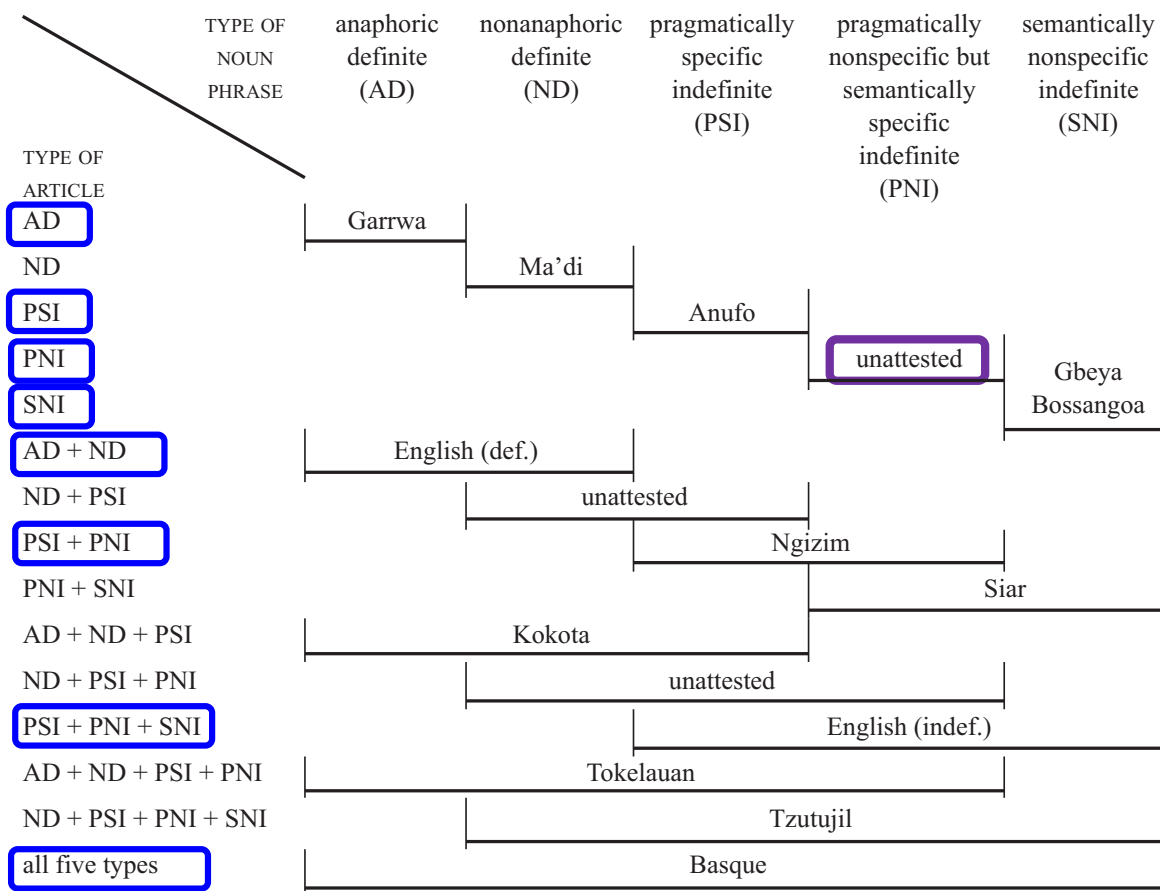


TABLE 1. A preliminary typology of articles.

An areal typology of definiteness marking

Languages of Torres & Banks (cf. François 2007, 2011) + Araki (François 2002)

	ANAPHORIC DEFINITE	NON-ANAPH. DEFINITE	TOPICAL, SPECIFIC INDEFINITE	NON-TOPICAL, SPECIFIC INDEFINITE	NON-SPECIFIC INDEFINITE
HIW	ne X				
	ne X in		ne X ñot	ne X së	së X
LTG	ne X				
	ne X in		ne X sise		si X
LHI	n-X				
	n-X e(n)		n-X tä n-X vëtwä [=‘1’]		
MTP	nA- X				
	nA-X e(n) nA-X nan		nA-X vítwag [=‘1’]		te X
LMG	n-X				
	n-X e		n- X vôwal [=‘1’]		
VRA	(ē)n X				
	(ē)n X ē		(ē)n X ne vôwal [=‘1’]		
VRS	o X				
	o X e		o X ni-tiwial [=‘1’]		?
MSN	o X				
	o X o		o X ni-tawal [=‘1’]		?
DRG	o X				
	o X neñ		tuar (o) X [=‘other’]		
OLR	X				
	X ne		tay X [=‘other’]		
LKN	X				
	X neñ		too X [=‘other’]		
MRL	nV- X				
	nV- X kan		nV- X tuwel [=‘1’]		
ARK	X				
	X ri		X mo hese [=‘1’]		re X

Abbreviations

ABL	ablative	MX	mixed gender
CPLT	complete	NEG:R	negation Realis
ANAPH	anaphoric	NPL	non-plural
ART	article	NSPEC	non-specific indefinite
ASSO	associative	OBL	oblique
CONT	continuous aspect	ORD	ordinal numeral
DEF	definite	PFT	perfect
DUR	durative	POSS	possessive classifier or linker
DX	deictic (1 st , 2 ^d , 3 ^d degree)	POT	potential
HUM	number classifier for humans	PRSTV	presentative
INDF	indefinite	QUOT	quotative
INTSF	intensifier	REL	relativiser
IPFF	imperfective	SPEC	specific indefinite
IRR	irrealis	SUBJ	subjunctive
LOC	locative	STAT	stative aspect

Hiw orthography

<i>orthogr.</i>	a	e	ë	ē	g	i	k	m	n	ñ	ñw	o	ö	ō	p	q	ṛ	s	t	u	v	w	y
<i>IPA</i>	a	ə	e	ɪ	ɣ	i	k	m	n	ŋ	ŋ ^w	ɔ	ø	o	p	k ^w	ʎ ^L	s	t	ʈ	β	w	j

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