Alexandre FRANÇOIS

LATTICE, CNRS – ENS-PSL – USN Australian National University

1. Non-verbal predicates in Oceanic languages: introduction

This overview of non-verbal predicates in the Oceanic family¹ will follow the general approach outlined by the editors of this volume in their position paper.² As we shall see, Oceanic languages typically form their non-verbal predicates using strategies that do not involve any copula.

1.1. The Oceanic family

Among the 1,270 languages of the vast Austronesian phylum, about 500 belong to a coherent family known as Oceanic (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002). All Oceanic languages descend from Proto Oceanic (POc), a language spoken in the second millennium BCE on the islands off New Guinea, in a region known by archaeologists as "Near Oceania" [Figure 1].

Figure 1 – Location of the Oceanic languages



¹ This work relates to the axis *Typology and dynamics of linguistic systems*, within the Paris-based program *Empirical Foundations of Linguistics* (LabEx EFL, ANR 10-LABX-0083). The present paper benefitted greatly from the feedback of the editors and their reviewers.

² Throughout this chapter, the term "position paper" will refer to Creissels, Bertinetto, and Ciucci (this volume).

About 3,200 years ago, the speakers of Proto Oceanic began a long process of eastward dispersal across the Pacific, eventually covering the areas known as Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. That dispersal gave rise to a number of different linguistic subgroups, shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 – A family tree of Oceanic languages (from Ross, Pawley and Osmond 2016)

Oceanic languages present more or less linguistic diversity, depending on which domain is under discussion. For example, they are unanimous in encoding clusivity in their personal pronouns, and in providing them with at least three numbers (singular, dual, plural). Yet they vary in their typical word order: SOV is dominant in Western Oceanic, SVO in the Solomons and Vanuatu, VOS in New Caledonia, VSO in Polynesian. Oceanic languages generally follow an accusative syntax, but ergative systems are found scattered across the family.

When it comes to non-verbal predicates – the topic of this study – Oceanic languages present a diversity of grammatical strategies. Thus, Lelepa (Central Vanuatu) has a verbal copula pi, in many respects similar to the English verb be:³

(1) Lelepa (Lacrampe 2014: 272)
 Kane faatu n-e=to, (e=pi lesko).
 but stone REL-3sG=be.there 3sG=COP real
 'But this stone here, it is real.'

Yet in the same archipelago, the Dorig language of northern Vanuatu forms its non-verbal predicates merely through juxtaposition (François forthcoming *a*), with no need of any verb *be* or any other form of copula:

(2) Dorig <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003197#S35> Ni (0 tdun vi-lwo nami kma). person 1EXCL:PL 3sg ART ATTR-great POSS 'He is a major figure for us.'

³ Throughout this chapter, the limits of the predicate constituent will be indicated, whenever relevant, using pointy brackets (...).

As for existential clauses, Xârâcùù (New Caledonia) typically forms them using a verb *nöö* 'stay, be located' (Moyse-Faurie 2019: 53):

(3) Xârâcùù (Moyse-Faurie 2019: 53) Chaa mârâdii (nöö nèmèi). one snake stay bush 'There is a snake in the bush.'

By contrast, Araki (Vanuatu) can build an existential predicate with no verb, using only a quantifier $\bar{r}e$ 'some, any' (François 2002: 65–67):

(4) Araki (François 2002: 154)
 (*Re* paniavu) lo ima rurunu?
 QTF pineapple LOC house cook
 '(Is there) some pineapple in the kitchen?'

Among these syntactic patterns, some are typical of Oceanic, while others are rather exceptional. In particular, the existence of a verbal copula as in (1), common among Indo-European languages, is a rarity in Austronesian; the default pattern is for non-verbal predicates to lack any copula, as in (2). Indeed, most Oceanic languages provide their word classes with the capacity to head a predicate phrase – whether they are nouns, pronouns, adjectives, numerals, possessive classifiers, prepositions, locatives or other adverbials. This property of being *omnipredicative* [§4.3] is crucial to understand how non-verbal predicates work in Oceanic languages.

1.2. Languages and sources

The main grammatical overviews of Oceanic languages (e.g. Pawley 1973; Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002; Ross 2004) tend to focus on nominal and verbal morphology, and say little about non-verbal predicates per se. A few publications, however, deal with non-verbal clauses in Oceanic: Ross (1998) and van Lier (2017a) on adjectives and property words; Moyse-Faurie (2019) on locative and existential constructions. To these areal overviews, one can add some descriptions of individual systems: e.g. Lazard and Peltzer (1991, 2000), as well as Vernaudon (2023), discuss various types of predicates in Tahitian; Pawley (2000) analyses the two copulas of Wayan Fijian; Lichtenberk (2008: 934–951) has a rich chapter on verbless sentences in Toqabaqita – among many other relevant publications.

The ability for nouns to head predicates has given rise to a debate about the limits of the noun/verb distinction in certain Oceanic languages (see Broschart 1997; Moyse-Faurie 2005; van Lier 2016, contributions in van Lier 2017b; Bril 2017). The consensus is that verbs and nouns do form separate word classes after all, yet in Oceanic they often share more properties together than they do in Indo-European languages; in particular, they are equally able to head a predicate.

For reasons of length, it would be impossible to pay full justice to the grammatical diversity of non-verbal predicates across all segments of the Oceanic family. This chapter will address as many construction types as possible, in a broad sample of Oceanic languages. The languages mentioned in the present study are listed in (5), and shown in Figure 3.

(5) The 21 languages mentioned in this study, and shown in Figure 3:					
	Papua N. Guinea:	Mn – Manam; K – Kove			
	Solomons:	Ko – Kokota; To – Toqabaqita; Te – <u>Teanu</u>			
	North Vanuatu:	H – <u>Hiw</u> ; Lt – <u>Lo-Toga</u> ; M – <u>Mwotlap;</u> D – <u>Dorig</u> ; A – <u>Araki</u>			
	Central Vanuatu:	T – Tape; Le – Lewo; L – Lelepa; SE – Nafsan			
	New Caledonia:	N – Nêlêmwa; X – Xârâcùù			
	Fiji:	W – Wayan Fijian			
	Polynesian:	U – East Uvean ; Ha – Hawaiian; Ta – Tahitian; Mā – Māori			

Figure 3 – Location of the Oceanic languages cited in this study



Sources from the literature will be cited along this study. The names underlined in (5) show the languages for which the sources are my personal field notes. Since 1997, I have indeed been collecting data in three areas: on the Araki language of Santo (François 2002); on the 17 languages of the Torres and Banks islands, in north Vanuatu (François 2011) – including Mwotlap (François 2001, 2003a); and on the four languages of Vanikoro in the eastern Solomons, particularly Teanu (François 2009, 2021).

Data from my fieldwork takes two different forms. Participant-observer immersion in each community allowed me to collect snippets of conversation in my handwritten notebooks (François 2014). In parallel, I recorded 389 narratives (50 hours) in 24 languages, of which 263 were transcribed and annotated in the presence of native speakers. Together, they form an electronic text corpus of 250,000 words, with the largest corpora being in Mwotlap (100,000 words), Lo-Toga, Hiw, Teanu and Dorig. All these recordings are archived in open access, in the Pangloss Collection of the CoCoON archive (François 2022a). Some are enriched with time-aligned transcriptions or translations, and indexed using permanent identifiers (DOI) at the sentence level. This chapter will always strive to cite my text corpora, and provide the relevant link.

1.3. This study

One example of a pure omnipredicative language is Mwotlap, a language of north Vanuatu. Because it treats virtually all its word classes as potential heads of predicates, this language shows a syntax where all non-verbal clauses are built without a copula. Mwotlap can be regarded as representative of the Oceanic family as a whole – or rather, as a radical illustration of the most canonical structures found across Oceanic.

For that reason, I propose to take Mwotlap as the backbone of this areal typology. The reader will be able to delve into the grammatical architecture of this one language in particular, and observe how it deals with all possible types of non-verbal predicates. Every subsection will begin by examining how things work in Mwotlap, before situating it in the broader context of Oceanic languages. This will help us cover essentially the whole array of constructions used in Oceanic to encode non-verbal predicates.

By way of background, I will start with a presentation of verbal predicates [§2]. The next sections will examine different subtypes of non-verbal predicates: property words and adjectives [§3]; nominal predicates, both equative and ascriptive [§4]; numeral predicates [§5]; possessive predicates [§6]; predicates based on adverbial phrases [§7]; existential predicates [§8]; and ostensive clauses [§9].

2. Verbal predicates

Mwotlap's default word order for all clauses, whether verbal or non-verbal, is given in (6):

(6) Constituent order in Mwotlap clauses
 SUBJECT + (PREDICATE) ±complements

Mwotlap has accusative alignment. Case is not marked morphologically, but by the position of arguments in the clause. Word order is highly constrained, and consistently SVO (that is, SV or AVO):

(7) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007409#S25>

Iplu-k (mē-dēn) ēgēn. partner-1sg PFT-arrive now 'My friend has arrived.'

(8) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003282#S76>

Gēn (tu-wuh) Vēnvēntey talōw. 1INCL:PL FUT-kill (name) tomorrow 'We will kill Vēnvēntey tomorrow.'

The subject of non-verbal predicates is always coded in the same way as S, the sole argument of intransitive verbal clauses.

The internal syntax of verbal clauses in Oceanic languages revolves around a constituent which the Oceanic tradition (e.g. Durie 1988; Evans 2003) calls the *verb complex* [vc]. The vc consists minimally of a verb (the head), which is optionally followed by one or more postverbal modifiers: e.g. a lexical "postverb" (a kind of adverb specialized in the postverbal

position), or a second verb in a serial pattern. The vC in (9), shown here between pointy brackets $\langle ... \rangle$, includes a verbal head *van* 'walk' and a postverb *yeghuquy* 'casually':

(9) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007411#S123> N-et (tit= yeghuquy van vēhte)vc lē-vētan van en. ART-person NEG:POT₁ = walk casually NEG:POT₂ DIREC LOC-land DEIC 'One cannot walk casually into that piece of land.'

Usually, lexical postverbs are restricted to that head-modifying function (François 2004b: 138–142; Rangelov 2022); they are the only lexical word class of Mwotlap that cannot head a predicate.

Attached to the lexical elements of the verb complex are markers of tense, aspect, mood, in the form of affixes or particles. In fact, a characteristic of North Vanuatu languages (which is not general in Oceanic) is that negative polarity is incorporated in the TAM paradigm – which must thus be renamed "TAMP" (tense, aspect, mood, polarity).⁴ Thus, (9) shows a discontinuous TAMP marker, the Negative potential⁵ *tit=... vēhte* 'cannot'. TAMP morphemes constitute a single paradigm of unanalysable, portmanteau forms that encode TAMP semantics in a single morpheme, whether it is simple or discontinuous. The TAMP paradigm of Mwotlap has 26 members (François 2003a: 37; 2005a: 133).

TAMP morphemes surface in two slots in the clause, labelled here TAMP1 and TAMP2, which surround the lexical elements of the verb complex – see (10). One slot TAMP1 follows the subject, and opens the verb complex; the second slot TAMP2 closes it, and precedes the object and other complements. Some TAMP morphemes fit in TAMP1 – e.g. the perfect mV-... in (7) or the future tV-... in (8); others in TAMP2 – like the presentatives in (142a-b). Some morphemes are bipartite, with one element in each slot, as in (9).

(10) Structure of a verbal clause in Mwotlap: subject (TAMP1 VERB (postverbs) TAMP2)vc object adjuncts

As we shall see later, the slot of the predicate's lexical head in (10) need not be a verb: it can equally be filled by a noun, an adjective, a numeral, or other major classes (except lexical postverbs).

In Mwotlap, a bare verb is not well-formed to be a predicate; it can head a valid predicate phrase only if it inflects for TAMP – e.g. the iamitive *mal* in (11). This property of requiring TAMP inflection to form a predicate is shared by verbs and by adjectives [§3.1].

(11)	Mwotlap	<https: 10.24397="" doi.org="" pangloss-0002300#s116=""></https:>
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*Tita	qanīyis.	Tita	⟨mal	qan̄yis).
mother	cook	mother	IAM	cook
*Mum coo	ok.	'Mum ha	as cook	ed already.'

⁴ See Schnell (2011: 31) for Vera'a; Malau (2016: 461) for Vurës; François (forthcoming *a*) for Dorig. From now on, I will use the term TAMP when dealing with North Vanuatu languages, and TAM otherwise.

⁵ Following conventions advocated by Haspelmath (2010: 674), this chapter will capitalize the names of grammatical categories when they are specific to a particular language. For example, the Perfect of Mwotlap is not the same linguistic entity as the Perfect of Tahitian.

Some of the principles outlined here for Mwotlap do apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other Oceanic languages, in spite of their syntactic diversity. For example, apart from the fact that Tahitian has a typical word order {Predicate–Subject}, and more precisely VSO – in contrast with the orders (6) and (10) shown for Mwotlap – the verb complex in (12) shows an internal syntax (TAM *verb* postverbs...) that is not so different from the one in (10):

(12) Tahitian (Lazard and Peltzer 1991: 11) (Nō ʻite noa atu ra)_{vc} vau iā-na. SBJ:1SG OBJ-3SG REC.PST See only DIREC DEIC 'I have just seen him.'

3. Adjectival predicates

3.1. Adjectives vs. verbs: similar but different

Oceanic languages vary somewhat in the way they treat their property words. A typical configuration is to have two distinct classes (Ross 1998, Lichtenberk 2005): a handful of "pure adjectives", used only as noun modifiers; and an open class of "adjectival verbs". I will here focus on the latter, as they are the ones compatible with the predicative function.

So-called adjectival verbs contrast with other verbs in their ability to modify a noun directly in a noun phrase, with no need of a relative clause. Thus, compare the Mwotlap adjectival verb d[i]lig 'murky' with the stative verb m[i]tiy 'sleep, be asleep':

(13) Mwotlap

nē-bē	dilig	≠	*nē-nēt <i>mey</i>	mitiy
ART-water	murky		ART-child	sleep
[ADJ] 'murk	y waters'	≠	[V] *a sleeping	g child

This grammatical behaviour is sufficient to contrast two word classes. We might choose to see them as two subtypes of verbs – as proposed by several authors – or decide to label them "adjectives" vs. "verbs", as I propose to do (François 2003:52, 2017:314). Because Mwotlap lacks a category of *pure adjectives*, it is more economical to analyze its "adjectival verbs" simply as a class of adjectives – which differ from verbs, even though they share some properties with them.

Indeed, although Mwotlap's adjectives and verbs form two separate classes in distributional terms, their contrast is neutralized in predicate position. As van Lier (2017a: 1275) puts it: "[P]redicatively used Oceanic property words typically adopt the grammatical features associated with event-word predicates, without needing a copula." This observation knows very few exceptions – one being Lelepa, shown in (1) above with its verbal copula *pi* [see also §4.4.2].

In Mwotlap, a predicative adjective implies the presence of a TAMP marker, just like we saw for verbs. Thus, the adjective d[i]lig in (14) can inflect with the same aspect prefix as the stative verb m[i]tiy in (15) – namely, the Stative *ne*-:

- (14) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007411#S49 Nē-bē ne-nlig. ART-water sTA-murky 'The water is/was murky.'
- (15) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S60 Ēgnō-n ne-mtiy. spouse-3sg sta-sleep 'His wife is/was asleep.'

Given clauses like (14)–(15), the only way to identify the word class of the predicate head is to run a syntactic test such as (13). If we accept my proposal to assign d[i]lig to a category of "adjectives" (rather than "adjectival verbs"), then an example like (14) does qualify as a non-verbal predicate – the topic of this study – whereas (15) does not.

The Stative aspect corresponds to the default situation, when a property is assigned to the subject at a given point in time (past or present⁶), without any reference to a change of property. For example, (14) may describe the temporary state of a pond gone murky for a moment (cf. Spanish copula *estar*), but it may as well correspond to a permanent property (cf. Spanish *ser*). Mwotlap's Stative aspect is non-committal with respect to the status (temporary vs. permanent) of the property it assigns to the subject.

In terms of etymology, the stative markers of North Vanuatu (Lo-Toga /na/, Mwotlap /nɛ-/, Löyöp /nɣɛ/, Lemerig /ɣɛ/...) reflect a former dummy noun **na ɣai* (ART thing).⁷ Thus, a structure like (14) was originally based on an NP predicate {N+Adj}, literally "The water (is) *thing* murky", with an underlying syntax parallel to the standard nominal clauses we'll see in §4.1.2. In fact, the same path was followed by Tahitian with the construction *mea* +Adj, now a stative marker, but originally a noun *mea* 'thing' used as a predicate (Vernaudon 2011; 2023:208):

(16) *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2011: 327)

(*E mea rahi*) te fare. INC thing big ART house 'The house is big.'

In North Vanuatu languages as much as in Tahitian, what started as a nominal construction has grammaticalised into a TAMP marker, which can now affect adjectives but also verbs – as in (15) or (17):

(17) Tahitian (Vernaudon 2011: 336)
 (Mea 'amu) Teva i te honu.
 STA eat (name) ов ART turtle
 'Teva likes to eat turtle ~ is a turtle eater.'

⁶ Mwotlap does not encode tense (François 2003: 39–43): thus (14)–(15) may translate 'is' or 'was'. In the context of the stories where these sentences were taken, the predicates would translate as past.

⁷ Dummy nouns will be mentioned again in the section on possessive predicates [§6], for the language Lo-Toga, under the form *na* (<**na yai*).

3.2. When adjectives inflect for TAM

Mwotlap's property words are compatible not just with the Stative aspect as in (14), but with any of the 26 morphemes that constitute the system's TAMP paradigm (François 2003a: 47–53). Considering that most TAMP markers impose a temporal structure on events, their combination with an adjective, or adjectival verb, triggers a dynamic reading (François 2003a: 49). Thus, while the Stative *ne*- (surfacing as *na*- through vowel harmony) in (18) assigns the property 'red' without implying any change of state, the Perfect *me*- (*ma*-) in (19) explicitly construes the property as a resultant state, and thus entails a reference to a change-of-state event of 'turning red':

(18) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002511#S12 Nō-yōtēnge na-lawlaw. ART-leaf sta-red

'The leaves are red.'

(19) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007414#S17>

Na-naw geh e kē **ma**-lawlaw qeso na-day. ART-wave PL TOP 3sg PFT-red as.if ART-blood 'The waves had *turned red*, as though it was blood.'

The combination of an adjective with a dynamic TAMP marker sometimes correlates with a different translation in English. Thus, taking *het* 'bad', compare the readings of the Stative *ne*- with those of the Apprehensive mood *tile*:

(20a)	Mwotlap		[AF.AP2.	055]			
	Na-trak	mino	ne -h	et.			
	ART-car	my	STA-ba	ad			
	[lit. 'my c	car (is) b	oaď]				
	a) 'My car is of poor quality.'					[PERMANENT STA	TIVE]
	b) 'My car is out of order.'			der.'		[TEMPORARY STA	TIVE]
(20b)	Na-trak	mino	tile	het.			
	ART-car	my	APPR	bad			
	[lit. 'my car might (<i>turn</i>) bad']						
	'My car might break down.'					[EV	'ENT]

Whether the property word receives a stative reading (*be P*) or a dynamic one (*turn P*), Oceanic languages usually lack any copula, and simply resort to their TAMP morphology – the same one they use with verbs. In other words, the ability of adjectives to inflect like verbs in predicate position means that typical Oceanic languages not only can do without a copula like *be*, but also without a verb *become* (François 2003:49).⁸

⁸ As a corollary, many dictionaries of Oceanic languages gloss their property words using such English wording as "be or become happy", "be or become red"... In fact, the ambiguity between stative and dynamic readings is not a characteristic of these particular lexemes – to be stored in the lexicon –, but a general behaviour of all property words in the system.

In Mwotlap, negating an adjectival predicate also involves the same negation as verbs (e.g. the realis negation et=... te), following the structure in (10):

(21) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003282#S33 Ikē wun (*et=malaklak te*) so kamyō so leg. 3sg maybe NEG1=happy NEG2 COMP 1EXCL:DU PROSP marry 'Maybe she's not happy that we're getting married.'

3.3. Two separate word classes: the case of Teanu

In sum, even though their behaviour inside the NP defines them as a separate word class, the adjectives of Mwotlap behave like stative verbs in all other respects, syntactically as well as semantically. This situation is common in Oceanic generally.

A less typical situation is found in Teanu (Temotu subgroup, Solomon Islands), where adjectives and verbs remain distinct even in predicative contexts. In order to form a predicate, verbs require a prefix, a portmanteau form that combines modality (realis vs. irrealis) with subject indexing (François 2009: 115):

(22) Teanu <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003351#S133>

Daviñevi	li-maliawo.	*Daviñevi	maliawo.						
women	3PL:REAL-light.fire	women	light.fire						
'The women light/lit a fire.'									

Beside the person-and-mood prefix, verbs can combine with other TAM particles, such as the Perfect *ka*:

(23) Teanu <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003351#S76>

Menuko ia-kiakali-tomoe.friendPOSS-1INCL:DUPFT3PL:REAL-disappear'Our friends have vanished.''Our friends have vanished.''Our friends have vanished.'

Adjectives are incompatible with subject prefixes, and simply form direct predicates:

(24)	Teanu		<https: dictionaria.clld.org="" sentences="" teanu-xv000981=""></https:>				
	Bele skin	voro stingray	ini 3sg	<i>(jiejie</i>). rough	/ *i- <i>jiejie</i> 3sg:real-rough		
	'The	skin of sti	ngray	s is rough.'			

Teanu thus treats its adjectives as a word class clearly distinct from verbs, not only in NPs, but also in predicate phrases. In such a language, property words cannot be described as "adjectival verbs", but only as "adjectives" strictly speaking. The assignment of lexemes to these two classes is not always predictable based on their meaning: thus, while the word *mimione* 'dry' is an adjective, its antonym *dobuo* is a verb '[be] wet', because it takes a subject prefix in predicate position (François 2021).

Even though they do not take the mood-and-subject prefix, adjectives remain compatible with all other TAM particles. For example, the adjective *moso* 'ripe' can form a semantically stative predicate (*Moso* 'it is ripe'), but it can also combine with the perfect, and receive a

dynamic reading (*Ka moso 'it has gone ripe'*). Thus, (25) shows TAM markers (*ka, kata, kape*) both with prefixed verbs (*maili, vene*) and with unprefixed adjectives (*kokoro, vitoko, moso*):

(25) Teanu <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003351#S108> Vongoro ka kokoro ponu, ka avtebe adapa **ka i**-maili almond PFT drv тор their PFT 3SG:REAL-grow and taro *i*-vene **kata ka** vitoko kape moso. 3sg:real-go.up IAM PFT close ripe FUT 'The almonds had dried up. As for their taros, they'd grown so much that they were almost ripe already." [lit. 'their taros have grownyb upyb it has already (become) closeADJ that they will (be) ripeADJ.']

In sum, Oceanic languages usually have a class of adjectives (or adjectival verbs) that contrast formally with (other) verbs. That contrast manifests itself at least through their behaviour inside noun phrases (e.g. Mwotlap) – but also, sometimes, even in the predicate position (e.g. Teanu). However, in spite of that distributional difference in word classes, adjectives can head a predicate, and even inflect for TAM – as much as verbs.

As we shall see now, this is a behaviour that adjectives share with nouns.

4. Nominal predicates

4.1. Standard noun predicates

4.1.1. A preliminary note on equative vs. ascriptive predicates

A few Oceanic languages distinguish formally between two sorts of noun predicates: ascriptive predicates (named "inclusion" in the position paper) vs. equative ones ("identity statements").

The Wayan variety of Fijian, for example, has two different copulas (Pawley 2000). *Tia* is used with ascriptive predicates, when the subject is ascribed to a general category:

(26a) Wayan Fijian (Pawley 2000: 312)

(Ei	tia	qasenivuli>	0	Tevita.				
3sg:npst	be:ASCR	teacher	PERS	(name)				
'Tevita is a teacher.' [ASCRIPTIVE]								

Its other copula ni- is reserved to equative predicates – i.e. clauses that state the identity between two referential expressions:

(26b)	(Ei	ni-a	na	qasenivuli>	0	Tevita.	
	3sg:npst	be:equat-3sg	ART	teacher	PERS	(name)	
'Tevita is the teacher.'							[EQUATIVE]

Section §4.4.2 below will mention some Polynesian languages which also distinguish the two constructions. That said, a more general tendency among Oceanic languages is to treat them syntactically in the same way – as we'll see now with Mwotlap.

4.1.2. Direct noun predicates

In Mwotlap, a noun predicate takes the form of a bare noun phrase, with no extra morphological material. This construction, sometimes described in the literature as *zero* copula (Stassen 1994, Lemaréchal 1997: 23–25), is labelled "juxtaposition construction" in the position paper:

(27) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S132
 Kē (na-tbunbun).
 3sg ART-fairy
 'She (was) a fairy.'

(28) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003309#S66> Na-kaka gōhkē e (*na-kaka te-le-pnō Qo*). ART-story DX1 TOP ART-story ORIG-LOC-land pig

'This story (is) a story from Pentecost island.'

Because a predicate NP is formally identical to a subject NP, the only way to distinguish them is through their relative position, as per the standard order $\{NP_{sbj} \langle NP_{pred} \rangle\}$ stated in (6).

Mwotlap uses this direct construction for its ascriptive predicates – whether a simple noun as in (27), or a noun phrase as in (29) [see also (2) in nearby Dorig]:

(29) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002531#S27> Imam mino, kē (n-et maymay). father my 3sg ART-person strong 'My father (is) a fierce man.' [ASCRIPTIVE]

The same juxtaposition strategy encodes equative clauses, as in (30):

(30)	Mwotlap		<https: 10.24397="" doi.org="" pangloss-0002492#s3=""></https:>			
	lqet (name)	e,	ēgnō-n	(Rōlēy).		
	'As for	lkpwet,	his wife (was	s) Rōlēy.'	[EQUATIVE]	

When a human referent is topicalised or otherwise activated in discourse, it is indexed with a 3SG resumptive pronoun $k\bar{e}$, as in (27) or (29). When it is [-human], it is indexed through zero anaphora, as in (28) or (31). Strictly speaking, in these sentences, the predicate's subject is not the first NP (which is a topic) but a zero phrase, in a structure {NP_{top}, $ø_{sbj}$ (NP_{pred})}:

(31) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002463, at 5'39">

No-towtow-eh e, (Ø) $\langle na-mwumwu \ liwo \ le\bar{n} \rangle$. ART-composition-song TOP 3SG:INAN ART-work big INTSF 'As for the art of poetry, (it is) considerable work.'

As a corollary, a well-formed Mwotlap declarative sentence may consist only of a noun phrase, preceded by a zero subject:

(32a) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S38> (Nē-qētqoqo). ART-gecko '(lt) (is) a gecko.'⁹

For such orphaned predicates, the label "juxtaposition construction" is less adequate; I prefer to describe all examples (27)–(32) as *direct nominal predicates* – where "direct" refers to the absence of any copula or overt predicator.

All examples so far showed nouns preceded by the article na- (or nV-). This article does not encode definiteness or specificity, but simply functions as an obligatory determiner (a "D" in a "DP"). Virtually all Mwotlap nouns¹⁰ require the presence of the article to form a valid NP – whether it is used as an argument (subject, object...) or as a direct predicate. For common nouns that require na-, a predicate cannot consist of the noun alone:

(32b) *(*Qētqoqo*). gecko

*'(It is) a gecko.'

An NP predicate may include the same modifiers as any NP argument: attribute adjective as in (29) or (31), locative modifier as in (28), possessor as in (40) or (49), etc. In addition, due to its status as a predicate head, a direct nominal predicate can also include so-called "postverbs", i.e. modifiers of the predicate head – like the restrictive ewe 'just' in (32c). The presence of this predicate modifier is proof that ne-qetqoqo in (32a) was not just an argument in an elliptic clause (as in Eng. *What did you see? – A gecko.*), but was the predicate itself.

(32c) (Nē-qētqoqo *ēwē*). ART-gecko just '(It is) just a gecko.'

In principle, any string that is well-formed as an argument NP can also form a predicate. When the head is a personal pronoun (implying an equative reading: *it's me, it's her*), it must belong to the set of independent pronouns, which generally have more phonological weight than argument pronouns. In Mwotlap, a monosyllabic form like 3SG *kē* can only be used as an argument; a direct NP predicate requires the heavier independent pronoun *ikē*, which is used in tonic contexts (stressed argument, topic, predicate):

(33) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002492#S109>

Na-mtig e (*ikē*)! ART-coconut TOP 3sg:TONIC [*context*: the enemy has turned into a coconut] 'The coconut, (that's) him!'

⁹ A gecko is a kind of small lizard, common in Vanuatu.

¹⁰ The only nouns that do not take the article *na*- are proper nouns, as well as a subset of [+human] nouns that behave like them (François 2005a: 122–126). These include kin terms – see (29) *imam* 'father', (30) *ēgnō* 'spouse', (55) *wulus* 'brother-in-law'.

Direct NP predicates are not only found in affirmative statements. Certain content questions – whether in direct speech (34) or reported speech (35) – are NP predicates:

- (34) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002388#S15>
 Imam nōnōm (iyē)?
 father Poss:2sg who
 'Who (is) your father?'
- (35) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003310#S31 No et= ēal te so (Ø) (na-hap). 1sg NEG1= know NEG2 COMP 3sg:INAN ART-what 'I don't know what it is.' [lit. 'I don't know that (it) (is) what.']

NP predicates, both ascriptive and equative, can be negated using the bipartite negation et=... te [see (21)] – still with no copula:¹¹

(36) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S71>

Nēk (et= *qētqoqo* te)! 2sg NEG1= gecko NEG2 'You (are) not a gecko!'

[NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIVE]

(37) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007436#S197>

 $\langle Et = in\bar{e}k$ te \rangle . $NEG_1 = 2SG:TONIC$ NEG_2 'It (is) not you.'

[NEGATIVE EQUATIVE]

The negation of standard noun predicates is distinct from negative existentials of the type *There is no N* [\$8.1]. We will come back to issues of negation in \$8.5.

Equative NP predicates are a context where the bipartite negation et=... te, in casual speech, can optionally delete its first component, yielding a rare variant of the negation ...te (François 2003a: 318). This happens especially with metalinguistic negation (Horn 1985):

(38) Mwotlap (François 2003a: 318) ("Mulumlum" te): ("na-malkōh")! slow NEG STA-careful 'No, not slow! He's just being careful.'

Even though the word *mulumlum* is lexically an adjective, it forms here an NP predicate due to its metalinguistic status: '[the word you should use (is)] not *slow*'. If the clause was about negating the property itself (as in 'he is not slow'), then the correct construction would not be (38), but the full negation et=... te, as in (21).

4.1.3. Anchored noun predicates

An alternative strategy for NP predicates in Mwotlap involves a deictic anchor in final position. We'll see that this anchor can be a pronoun or a deictically-marked NP; but most

¹¹ We'll see that Lo-Toga, one of Mwotlap's neighbours, requires a special negative copula in such contexts – see §4.2.1.

commonly, that anchor is simply a demonstrative:¹²

(39) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S49> (Nē-qētqoqo) agōh. ART-gecko DX1 'This (is) a gecko.' [ASCRIPTIVE PREDICATE]

(40) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S89>
 (Na-lqōvēn mino) agōh.
 ART-woman POSS:1SG DX1
 'This (is) my wife.' [EQUATIVE PREDICATE]

Faced with sentences like (39) or (40), one may wonder which segment is the predicate. If it is the deictic, then these clauses could be a form of "ostensive" construction [§9], and (40) would translate 'Here is my wife' or 'My wife is here'. However, this analysis does not work. In order to locate a referent in space, one would not use the person-anchored deictics (DX1, DX2),¹³ but the ostensive deictic *gen* (glossed 'DX3'), optionally supported by the ostensive particle *ete* [§9]. In that case, the deictic is indeed the predicate:

(41)	(Ete)	na-lqōvēn	mino	⟨gēn⟩.	
	OST	ART-woman	POSS:1SG	dx3	
	'Here	is my wife./l	My wife is	here.'	[OSTENSIVE PREDICATE]

Yet contrary to the ostensive clause (41), the function of (40) is not to locate a referent in space, but to define the nature of the subject – answering the question "What/Who is that?". This reading is also evident in (42):

 (42) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003282#S119>
 Ba (na-hap geh) qele gōh?! – (Yagnigni-mem) anen! but ART-what PL like DX1 spouses-1EXCL:PL DX2
 'But what (are) these [creatures]?! – Those (are) our husbands!'

On semantic grounds, the better analysis is thus to say that the predicate in (40) or (42) is in fact the initial noun phrase. This interpretation can be confirmed by observing the syntax of the negation. The negator (et=... te) will affect not the final demonstrative, but the initial NP – another proof that this is indeed the predicate:

(43)	Mwotlap	https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-00032			S85>
	<pre>{Et= imam</pre> NEG1= father	<i>nōnōm</i> POSS:2SG	te) NEG2	gōh. px1	
	'This (is) not	your fathe	er.'	[N	IEGATIVE EQUATIVE]

¹² (39) includes a "conclusive" demonstrative *agōh*, required in final position of affirmative statements (François 2005a: 142); it contrasts with the non-conclusive form *gōh* that appears sentence-medially – e.g. *nē-qētqoqo gōh* 'this gecko'.

¹³ Mwotlap, like many Oceanic languages, has a three-way demonstrative system. What I gloss DX1 refers to the speaker's sphere; DX2 to the addressee's sphere. As for the ostensive DX3, it is defined independently of the speech act participants (François 2001: 282–285).

In sum, these constructions constitute another form of noun predicates, similar to the ones we saw in §4.1.2. However, they correspond to a different syntactic subtype, with properties of their own; I will label them *anchored noun predicate* (ANP), in contrast with the *standard noun predicates* (SNP) that lack the deictic anchor. The two constructions are semantically equivalent – being able to form ascriptive as well as equative clauses – yet they are formally distinct.

Whereas the SNP follows the standard constituent order (6), namely {SUBJECT + PREDICATE} – with a subject that is sometimes realised as zero as in (31) or (32a) – the ANP follows the structure in (44):

(44) Constituent order in an anchored noun predicate \rightarrow {PREDICATE + ANCHOR}

The ANP construction is the only one of Mwotlap that systematically lacks a subject, and begins with the predicate. Even a [+human] referent would fail to surface as a subject in an ANP: although a subject pronoun $k\bar{e}$ is expected in an SNP like (45a), it is ungrammatical in an ANP like (45b):

(45a)	Kē 3sg	⟨na-lqōvēn _{ART} -woman	mino). POSS:1SG			
	'She i	s my wife.'			[SNP]	
(45b)	* <i>Kē</i> 3sg	⟨ <i>na-lqōvēn</i> _{ART} -woman	<i>mino</i> > POSS:1SG	<i>agōh.</i> _{DX1}		
	*'She is my wife here.'					

In a sentence like (45b), the subject and the deictic are mutually exclusive. With a clausefinal deictic, the only possible construction is an ANP like (40), with no overt subject. And yet, that final deictic is not well-formed to be a subject, even a postposed one. Being neither the subject nor the predicate, it is better described as a *deictic anchor*, whose role is to overtly bind the predicate to an element in the immediate context.

Just like SNPs, ANPs can form ascriptive predicates as in (39), or equative ones as in (40). Only the latter interpretation is possible when the predicate is a personal pronoun:

(46) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S83> Ba tita! (Ino) agōh! but mother 1sg:TONIC DX1 'But Mom! This (is) me!'

Anchored noun predicates are relatively common in Oceanic, even when presented under other names – see the "presentational identificational sentences" of Toqabaqita (Lichtenberk 2008: 941). They also occur in the English-based creole Bislama (cf. Crowley 2004: 114), where (40), (43), (46) would translate respectively as (40'), (43'), (46'):

(40') Bislama

(Woman blo mi) ia. woman POSS 1SG DEIC 'That's my wife.' (43') (I no papa blo yu) ia. PRED NEG father POSS 2SG DEIC 'This is not your father.'

(46') (Mi) ia. 1sg deic 'It's me.'

In all these Bislama examples, the predicate phrase $\langle ... \rangle$ ends with prosodic prominence, whereas the final deictic *ia* is systematically unstressed, and uttered with a downstep typical of post-focus position: /^{*}mi ^{*}ia/ 'lt's me'.

Aside from demonstratives proper, the deictic anchor in Mwotlap can also take the form of a personal pronoun (always in its 'tonic', independent form):

(47) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S72> (lgni-k) inēk! spouse-1sg 2sg:TONIC 'You're my wife!'

At first glance, one might think that *igni-k* 'my wife' in (47) is the subject, and *inēk* 'you' (being a tonic pronoun) is the predicate – with a literal reading 'my wife, that's you' [cf. (33)].¹⁴ The ambiguity can again be solved through the test of the negation – as shown by these corpus examples:

(48)	Mwot	lap <https: d<="" th=""><th colspan="3">doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S72></th></https:>		doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S72>		
	⟨Et=	igni	te>	ino!		
	NEG ₁ =	spouse:2sg	NEG ₂	1sg:tonic		
	ʻl am	not your wif	e !'			

Occasionally, the anchor can be a noun phrase with its own deictic markers:

(49) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003262#S59> (Et= imam nōnōm te) imam mino en. NEG1= father POSS:2SG NEG2 father POSS:1SG DEIC 'My father (is) not your father.'

The position of the negation in (49) makes it clear that we're dealing with an ANP construction: first the predicate, then its anchor.

4.2. TAM-inflected noun predicates

Whether they were SNP or ANP clauses, the noun predicates examined so far involved statements that were aspectually and modally unmarked: they consisted in assigning a stable property to a subject, at a given point in time. But what happens with NP predicates that are semantically dynamic?

¹⁴ This ambiguity is reminiscent of the sort of "argument-predicate reversal" which the position paper identifies in the syntax of nominal predication generally.

4.2.1. A copula for clauses marked in TAM or negated

In other language families, even when a language can do without a copula for standard noun predicates, it often requires one when the statement involves other tenses and aspects than the simple present, as happens for instance in Russian or Arabic. This typological tendency verifies in one Oceanic language: Lo-Toga (Torres islands, Vanuatu).

Lo-Toga does not need a copula when it deals with adjectival predicates, whether in the positive (Stative *na n̄wōdōl*) or in the negative (*tate pero*):

(50) Lo-Toga https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003283#S35>

Ne vegevage pi gerite (*tate pero*), (*na nwodol* wereno). ART story about octopus NEG long STA short just 'The story of the octopus isn't long, it's very short.'

Just like Mwotlap, it uses the juxtaposition strategy for its standard noun predicates:

(51) Lo-Toga https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003292#S45
 Nike (ne tēle) hitë nike (ne nwië)?
 2sg ART person or 2sg ART demon
 '(Are) you a human, or (are) you a demon?' [ASCRIPTIVE]

However, Lo-Toga requires a copula da whenever the noun predicate inflects for TAM – like the Aorist in (52) – or is negated (53):

(52) Lo-Toga <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003292#S20> Ni meñëni-e vē—n vēn vēn, (*ni da tēle luwō*). A0:3sg feed-OBJ:3sg DUR:INTSF DUR DUR A0:3sg COP person big 'She raised him so well that he *became an adult.*' [PHASAL ASCRIPTIVE]

(53) Lo-Toga https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003283#S26>

(Tate da gerite), (megole mē) pe!NEG COP octopus child POSS:3sg now'It was not an octopus, it (was) her child!'[NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIVE]

This verb da comes from an etymon * $da\gamma o$ 'do, make'; it has grammaticalised into a general auxiliary forming causatives (François 2010: 528 – see (81)), and also into a copula 'be, become'.

In addition, the combination *tate da* [tatəˈt̪^sa] (NEG+COP) shown in (53) has coalesced into a negative copula *deda* [t̪^səˈt̪^sa], which works as its synonym:

(53') Lo-Toga https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003283#S29>

Deda gerite>.
NEG:COP octopus
'It was not an octopus.'

[NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIVE]

Through this innovation, Lo-Toga now belongs to the set of languages endowed with a dedicated copula for negative NP predicates – such as Tahitian *e'ere* [§8.5] or Arabic *laysa*.

But while these facts of Lo-Toga are consistent with typological tendencies, they are not representative of its family. Only a minority of Oceanic languages have developed a verb *be*

[§4.4.1], and Lo-Toga is the only one of its area to have done so. The default pattern in Oceanic languages is to do without any copula for its noun predicates [§4.4].

4.2.2. TAMP-inflected predicates: nouns or verbs?

We saw earlier how Mwotlap can combine its TAMP particles with adjectives [§3.2]. Its nouns behave essentially the same: whenever a nominal property is presented as temporally, aspectually or modally unstable, the corresponding noun will combine with TAMP particles, in the same slot as verbs or adjectives.

Sentence (54) shows a series of predicates in the Perfect aspect, none of which contains a verb. The aspect prefix (mV-) combines with the noun $l\bar{o}mgep$ 'young man, youngster' in just the same way as it does with adjectives *liwo* 'big', $b\bar{o}yb\bar{o}y$ 'sturdy', $w\bar{e}$ 'good':

(54) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003282#S75> Na-taybe-n Vēnvēntey e kē (mi-*lwo*) ēgēn, kē (mō-*lōmgep*) TOP **3**SG PFT-big ART-body-3sg (name) now 3sg **PFT-youngster** a hēywē! Kē (mō-*bōybōy*), na-taybe-n (mē-wē mē-wē)! а SUB true 3SG PFT-sturdy ART-body-3sg PFT-good SUB PFT-good 'Vēnvēntey's body has grown up, he's really become a young man! He's become strong, his body's got really healthy.'

A comparison between the semantically similar examples (52) and (54) confirms that Lo-Toga and Mwotlap, in spite of their linguistic and geographical closeness, show key differences in the way they allow, or not, their nouns to combine directly with TAMP markers.¹⁵

In Mwotlap, nominals can combine with TAMP inflection only when they are predicative. It thus differs from the languages which allow nominal tense also within argument noun phrases (with such meanings as 'their former teacher', 'her future children') – as happens in the Tupí-Guaraní family (Bertinetto 2020).

The "TAMP-inflected noun predicates" (TINP) of Mwotlap constitute, in principle, another instance of juxtaposition construction – to use the category defined by this volume's position paper. Simply, it is a construction where the NP predicate inflects for TAMP – something which NPs cannot do when used as arguments.¹⁶

Faced with examples such as (54), where $l\bar{o}mgep$ occupies exactly the same syntactic slot as adjectives or verbs, one could be tempted to see there a case of conversion from a noun ('youngster') into a verb ('become a young man; grow up') – in which case we would be dealing here with a verbal predicate after all. However, the lexeme $l\bar{o}mgep$ in (54) really continues to be a noun, even when it combines with the TAM morphology which other languages typically associate with verbs. Indeed, it is a property of all nouns, in this language, to be compatible with TAMP morphology. Compared with direct noun predicates {*X* is *N*}, the

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of these TAMP-inflected noun predicates and the questions they raise, see François (2003a:53–72, 2004a) for Mwotlap; François (2017) for Hiw. For a general discussion of tensed nominals, see Nordlinger and Sadler (2004), Lecarme (2008), Bertinetto (2020).

¹⁶ The position paper lists a number of "predicative inflection constructions" where non-verbal predicates undergo TAM inflection; yet none of their subcategories seem to correspond to the TINPs of Mwotlap.

"semantic increment" (Evans and Osada 2005: 371) inherent in this construction can always be compositionally calculated based on the semantics of the TAMP morpheme. These TINPs essentially perform the same operation as direct predicates (i.e., *equative* or *ascriptive* predication), except they do so by putting the nominal property in (temporal, aspectual, modal) perspective.

Positing a conversion (zero-derivation) of a noun into a verb can only be justified when the semantics of the resulting predicate fails to be compositional. The case of kinship terms (François 2001:729, 2004a: 192) is revealing in this respect. In (55a), the property {*be brothers-in-law*} is simply assigned to the subject, in a statement that is modally and aspectually unmarked; this is therefore a simple SNP:

(55a) Mwotlap

Dōyō (**wulus**). 1INCL:DU brother.in.law 'You and I (*are*) *brothers-in-law*.' [Standard Noun Predicate]

Sentence (55b) also assigns that same property to the subject, but places it in a modal perspective – that of the apprehensive mood, which may be glossed 'I'm afraid X might happen' (François forthcoming b). This is still a non-verbal predicate – but this time, a TINP:

(55b) Dōyō (*tiple wulus*)! 1INCL:DU APPR brother.in.law '(I'm afraid) you and I *might (become) brothers-in-law*!' [TINP]

By contrast, (56) shows the same form *wulus* with a different meaning:

(56) Nēk (so wulus) no.
2sg prosp treat.as.brother.in.law 1sg
[lit. 'you should brother-in-law me.']
'You should regard me as your brother-in-law.' [VERBAL PREDICATE]

In (56), the meaning of the word *wulus* cannot be reduced to just an ascriptive predicate with a TAMP perspective. While noun predicates in Mwotlap are systematically monovalent, we are dealing here with a bivalent verb *wulus* 'regard s.o. as o.'s brother-in-law'; the referent who is assigned the property (of being a brother-in-law) is no longer the subject as in noun predicates, but the object. The best analysis is to consider that (56) is actually a verb, which has been converted (zero-derived) from a noun. This conversion pattern is only productive for a handful of kin terms, and is arguably a case of "delocutive" derivation (Benveniste 1966 [1958]). In sum, whereas (55b) is a (TAMP-inflected) noun predicate, (56) is a verbal one, which falls outside the scope of the present chapter.

4.2.3. What nouns inflect for TAMP?

In principle, TAMP inflection can affect just any noun of Mwotlap; this is indeed an argument to regard this grammatical property as a feature of the word class Noun as a whole (François 2017:328). That said, in a naturalistic corpus, some nouns lend themselves more readily to TAMP inflection than others (François 2003a: 53–72).

TAM markers are mostly found with those nouns whose meaning is compatible with modal or aspectual instability. This is true, for example, of nouns referring to stages in life ('child',

'adult', 'man', 'woman', 'old man', 'old woman'...) – as in (54). Sentence (55b) also showed a kinship term referring to a non-permanent stage in life, as when two people 'become in-laws' on the occasion of a new alliance.

Other nouns referring to social status or occupation are eminently aspect-compatible, e.g. *mayanag* 'chief', *empi* 'Member of Parliament', etc.:

(57) *Mwotlap* [AF-AP09-48a]

Nok (so *tēytēybē ne gatgat*). 1sg prosp healer of language 'I'd like to (*become a*) *linguist.*'

Another type of nouns that often combine with TAM inflection are the names of plants or animals when they evolve in time – e.g. the growth stages of a coconut:

(58) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002415#S321> Kē (ni-wōh), (ni-*myot*), kē 3sg AO-green.coconut 3sg AO-sour.coconut kē (ni-*wōmenmen*) kē (ni-sisgoy). 3sg AO-ripe.coconut 3sg AO-fall. 'It'll (become a) green-coconut; it'll (become a) sour-coconut; it'll (become a) ripe-coconut, and then it will fall down.'

Grammatically, (58) is a series of four clauses in the tense I call "Aorist" (François 2003a: 165–199), used among others for sequences of events, either in the past or in the future. While the final clause has a verb *sisgoy* 'fall', the three previous clauses employ nouns, which refer to the successive stages of the coconut.

In all the examples cited so far, TAM inflection corresponds to ascriptive predicates, in which the subject itself evolves in time. The predicative property N is presented as valid at a given date, but invalid at another date – for example, a person who was once a child becomes a young man or an adult. Although this is less frequent, a TINP can also correspond to an equative clause. This is clear when the predicate is a personal pronoun:

(59) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007414#S85> (Et = ikē qete) nen. NONDUM1= 3sG:TONIC NONDUM2 DX2 [watching out for her father, as several people come by] 'That (is) not him yet.' [EQUATIVE TINP]

We had already seen a predicative $ik\bar{e}$ in (33) 'The coconut, that's him!': this was a simple SNP, which simply equated two referential expressions ('X=Y') with no reference to time. By contrast, in (59) the pronoun $ik\bar{e}$ inflects for a specific TAMP category, namely the nondumitive et= ... qete 'not yet'.¹⁷ This has the semantic effect of placing the equative predication in a

¹⁷ The so-called *nondum* phasal aspect (Veselinova & Devos 2021), or nondumitive (François forthcoming *a*), is named after the Latin negation *nondum* 'not yet'. The nondumitive is the negative counterpart of the iamitive (from Latin *iam* 'already').

temporal perspective: '[I watch all these men coming one after the other, but] *this is not my father yet.*'

4.3. Summary: Noun predicates in Mwotlap

In sum, Mwotlap lacks any copula, and systematically forms its noun predicates using the juxtaposition strategy. Mwotlap is a perfect example of an *omnipredicative* language (to quote the concept coined by Launey 1994 for Classical Nahuatl): i.e., a language in which all major word classes can head a predicate, with no need of extra morphology or operator.

Omnipredicativity does not imply that the noun-verb distinction is blurred: languages can be omnipredicative and yet otherwise show clearcut contrasts between different word classes (Lemaréchal 1989: 25; Launey 1994: 284; Mithun 1999; François 2017: 329). Simply, these word classes, in spite of their differences, share the property of being able to head a predicate phrase with no copula.¹⁸

Nominal predicates in Mwotlap can be ascriptive or equative. They may involve a noun alone, or a noun and its modifiers, or a personal pronoun. Beyond these characteristics shared by all noun predicates, Mwotlap contrasts three subtypes of juxtaposition constructions:

- 1. *Standard noun predicates* (SNP) follow the pattern {Subject_{NP} (Predicate_{NP})}, and are semantically unmarked in terms of tense, aspect or mood.
- 2. Anchored noun predicates (ANP) conform to an idiosyncratic order {(Predicate_{NP})– Anchor}, where the anchor is a deictically-marked phrase.
- 3. *TAMP-inflected noun predicates* (TINP) follow the same syntax as SNPs, except they include explicit inflection of tense, aspect, mood or polarity.

4.4. Copulas and their absence among Oceanic languages

4.4.1. The lack of copula, a strong tendency in the Pacific

Because the vast majority of Oceanic languages are omnipredicative, the syntax of their nominal predicates follows the same patterns we just saw for Mwotlap. To take random examples across the family [see the map in Figure 3], (60) illustrates an equative SNP in Manam, (61) an ascriptive SNP in Tape, (62) an ascriptive ANP in Nêlêmwa, (63) a TINP in Kokota:

(60) Manam (Lichtenberk 1983a:451)
 ne-Ø (ategisi wauwau).
 this-3sg teacher new
 'This is the new teacher.'

¹⁸ Our reasoning on nouns is thus parallel with the one we had on adjectives [§3.3]: adjectives and verbs may share the ability to head a predicate – and even inflect for TAM – and yet they can constitute two distinct word classes.

- (61) *Tape* (Crowley 2006: 166) Netite vës esen (*tëvëlëkh*). child little Poss:3sg girl 'Her little child was a female.'
- (62) Nêlêmwa (Bril 2017: 221)
 (Caan) hoona.
 Lethrinus Dx2
 'That (is) a Lethrinus [fish species].'
- (63) Kokota (Palmer 2009: 273)
 Getu (n-e-ke mane datau).
 (name) REAL-3SG-PFV man chief
 'Getu was the chief [at that time].'

This observation, that Oceanic languages most often construct their noun predicates without a copula, is confirmed by the recently released GramBank typological database (Skirgård et al. 2023). Table 1 analyses GramBank's feature GB117: "*Is there a copula for predicate nominals?*",¹⁹ and focuses on the languages for which an answer (yes or no) is provided. At the global scale, copulas are preferred by the majority of the world's languages – namely 56.8% of the sample for which GramBank has data (1152/2029). Compared to that worldwide tendency, Pacific languages show the opposite tendency, to lack copulas. This is true at the level of the macro-area "*Papunesia*" (77.8%), and at the level of the Austronesian linguistic family (81.1%). The Oceanic section of Austronesian shows similar results, with 77.0% of copula-less languages.

area	#lgs on GramBank	# w∕ info on copulas	copula present	copula absent	% with copula	% without copula
world	2407	2029	1152	877	56.8 %	43.2 %
"Papunesia"	726	599	133	466	22.2 %	77.8 %
Austronesian	511	417	79	338	18.9 %	81.1 %
Oceanic	275	235	54	181	23.0 %	77.0 %

Table 1 – Languages with vs. without copulas, according to GramBank (Skirgård et al. 2023)

Figure 4 shows a map of the Oceanic area, also taken from the same GramBank database. Yellow dots show languages with a copula, dark green dots those without one. (The left side of the map includes Oceanic as well as Papuan languages.)

¹⁹ Link: https://grambank.clld.org/parameters/GB117.

Figure 4 – Sample of the Oceanic area, showing languages with a copula (yellow) vs. those without one (dark green). Source: GramBank (Skirgård et al. 2023)



4.4.2. The different types of Oceanic copulas

Languages with copulas are a minority in Oceanic, but they do exist.

Thus, we saw in §4.2.1 that Lo-Toga requires a verbal copula *da* when encoding TINP clauses. In Central Vanuatu, the language Nafsan (South Efate) has gone one step further, and generalized the use of a verbal copula for all its non-verbal predicates (Thieberger 2006: 173–174, 270–273):

 (64) Nafsan (Thieberger 2006: 174)
 Nafnag nen (i=ta pi nafnag wi mau). food that 3sg.REAL= NEG1 be food good NEG2 'That food wasn't good food.'

This *pi* copula behaves like any verb in Nafsan, including stem-initial mutation depending on modality (*pi* realis vs. *fi* irrealis): it is thus a verbal copula 'be'. As a result of having grammaticalized this copula, Nafsan has essentially lost the "juxtaposition" strategy (Thieberger 2006: 273). Lacrampe (2014: 238–242) reports on a similar copula *pi/fi* in the neighbouring language Lelepa – see (1), where it even served to introduce an adjectival predicate. Early (1994: 320–321) describes a copula verb *pe/ve* in nearby Lewo, which is cognate with *pi/fi*, and behaves in a similar way.

In another region, Pawley (2000) shows that Wayan Fijian presents not one but "two *be*'s", respectively for equative and for ascriptive noun predicates – see §4.1.1.

Polynesian languages present a less clearcut picture. They lack any copula verb that could be glossed 'be'; but they do not use the juxtaposition strategy as commonly as we saw for most other Oceanic languages.

In Tahitian, where the standard order is {Predicate – Subject} [see (12), (16), (17)], equative noun predicates can, in principle, be expressed as the direct juxtaposition of two NPs (Paia & Vernaudon 2004: 58):

(65) Tahitian (Vernaudon 2023:152)
 (Te pō) te taime fifi roa nō'u.
 ART night ART time painful INTSF POSS:1SG
 'The most difficult moment for me (was) the night.'

If the construction shown in (65) were standard in this language, we would conclude that Tahitian simply uses the juxtaposition strategy for its equative predicates, in line with the various examples we've seen for typical Oceanic languages (27)–(35), (60)–(63). However, this structure is in fact rare in Tahitian (Vernaudon 2023:151). In the vast majority of equative clauses, the predicate is preceded by an optional particle 'o – especially when that predicate is a proper noun, or a personal pronoun:

 (66) Tahitian (Lazard and Peltzer 1991: 13)
 ('O mātou) t-ā 'oe mau tamari'i. ID 1EXCL:PL ART-POSS 2SG PL child
 'Your children, that's us.'

That particle 'o has been glossed ID for 'identification particle' (Lazard and Peltzer 1991:13) – an ambiguous gloss. Its function is to give prominence to a noun phrase, whether it is a sentential topic, an argument, or a predicate. Although 'o is still optional with most NPs, it has become almost systematic in marking the predicate phrase in equative clauses; and indeed, Vernaudon (2023:151) glosses it EQ for 'equative copula'. That said, contrary to the 'be' verb of Nafsan, this 'o copula of Tahitian is not a verb – nor is it obligatory.

As for ascriptive predicates, they are formed using a particle *e*, sometimes glossed INC for 'inclusive':

(67) Tahitian (Vernaudon 2023:113)
 (*E* 'ao) terā manu.
 INC green.heron ART bird
 'That bird is a green heron.'

That particle *e* is cognate with the particle *he* of Māori, which Bauer (1997) glosses 'classifying particle' (CLSF):

(68) Māori (Bauer 1997, in Vernaudon 2011: 328)
 (*He* kahiako) ia.
 CLSF teacher 3sg
 'She is a teacher.'

The cognate morphemes 'o and he of Hawaiian have been the object of a controversy: while Carter (1996) called them "copular verbs", Cook (1999) dismissed this analysis, and concluded that 'o is a "copular preposition", and he an "indefinite determiner". If Cook's interpretation were applied to Māori and Tahitian, then these languages should be viewed as ones where nominal predication involves a (quasi) copula for equative clauses, but not for ascriptive ones.

In these languages, the morpheme *e* or *he* disappears in TINP constructions. Thus, (69) shows the noun *tamaiti* 'boy' heading a predicate with the perfect '*ua*, implying a change of state:

(69) *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2011:319) ('Ua *tamaiti* a'e ra) Ta'aroa. PFT boy DIREC DEIC (name) 'Ta'aroa (*became*) a boy.'

A sentence like (69) confirms that Tahitian nouns are inherently predicative – unlike those, for example, of Nafsan – since they do not require a copula to form a predicate. (Incidentally, the GramBank database cited above interprets Tahitian as being a language with no copula.) This is in line with the general tendencies we have seen for Oceanic as a whole.

Table 2 recapitulates the four main grammatical profiles we encountered. It shows how NP predicates (equative or ascriptive) are encoded, first in the standard (non-TAM) case, vs. in combination with TAM inflection. Among the four profiles cited here, type 2 prevails among Polynesian languages, but type 1 is dominant in the rest of Oceanic. Types 3 and 4 are restricted to smaller areas.

Table 2 – Four language profiles for noun predicates in Oceanic

	standard NP predicate	там-inflected NP predicate	languages cited
type 1	bare NP	TAM+noun	Mwotlap, Nêlêmwa, Manam, Kokota++
TYPE 2	non-verbal copulas ?	TAM+noun	Māori, Hawaiian, Tahitian+
type 3	bare NP	TAM+verbal copula	Lo-Toga
TYPE 4	verbal copula	там+verbal copula	Nafsan, Lelepa, Lewo; Wayan Fijian

5. Numeral predicates

Mwotlap commonly uses its numerals adnominally as in (70a), but also predicatively as in (70b). The linear order is identical in (70a) and (70b): the difference in syntactic constituency is marked by prosody:

(70a) Mwotlap

na-yño-n vēvet ART-leg-3sg four 'its four legs'

(70b) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S27>

Na-yño-n 〈**vēvet**〉. ART-leg-3sg four 'It has four legs.' [lit. 'its legs (are) four']

A numeral predicate can receive an existential interpretation²⁰ – or its corollary [\$8.4], a plain-possessive reading ["X has Y"] as in (70b) or (71):

²⁰ For existential predicates, see §8.

(71) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002492#S2>

Iqet, igeyathēthē-n, kēy(soñwul nanme vōyō).IkpwetHUM:PLbrothers-3sg3PLtenUNIT'Ikpwet had twelve brothers.'[lit. 'Ikpwet, his brothers, they (were) ten plus two.']

Predicative numerals can be used for counting years or hours of the day:

(72) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003273#S65>

Na-lo 〈**soñwul**〉. ^{ART-sun ten 'It (is) ten oʻclock.'}

(73) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002419#S22
 Nē-nētmey, n-ēte nonon (soñwul nanme tēvēlēm).
 ART-child ART-year his ten UNIT five
 'The child (is/was) fifteen.' [lit. his years (were) ten plus five]

Examples (70)–(73) are numeral predicates that are valid at a given point in time – either the moment of utterance, or the moment of reference in a narrative [see fn.6 p.8]; in that respect, they can be compared to the standard noun predicates we saw in §4.1. But just like nouns can inflect for tense-aspect-mood [§4.2], likewise numerals are compatible with TAMP morphology. This happens when the clause emphasizes the change of state, e.g. shifting from one number to another (cf. 'turn three'):

(74) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003273#S20

Na-lo ni-van hōw ni-**vētēl**. ART-sun AO-go down AO-three 'The sun was going down, it (turned) three [o'clock].'

(75) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002531#S86>

Ni-siokm-atlō,mi-**vitwag**,mō-**vōyō**,ART-shipPFT-appearPFT-onePFT-twoni-siokmē-**vētēl**,ni-siokmē-**vēvet**.ART-shipPFT-threeART-shipPFT-four'Then the ships began to appear: there was one, then two,then there were three ships, then four...'

In such sentences, numerals occupy the same slot as verbs: they take the same aspect prefixes (Aorist ni-, Perfect mV-) as the verbs (van, $atl\bar{o}$) in the same sentences. While one might propose that numerals have been turned into verbs in (74)–(75), I would instead suggest that we are simply dealing with verbless, numeral predicates that inflect for TAM – just like we saw for adjectives and nouns.

In Araki, numerals are best analysed as a subclass of verbs, because they systematically inflect for subject and mood in the same way as verbs (François 2002: 81–89):

(76) Araki (François 2002: 155)
Raju (mo= hese) lo ima rūrūnu. person 3sg:REAL= one LOC house cook
'There is someone in the kitchen.' [lit. 'person is one in the kitchen']

By contrast, Mwotlap treats numerals and verbs as two distinct word classes. Indeed, numerals can not only form TAM predicates like verbs as in (74)–(75), but also direct predicates as in (70)–(73), a construction that is ungrammatical for verbs [see (11)].

Numerals are predicative virtually everywhere in Oceanic: see Lichtenberk (1983a:338ff) for Manam, Sato (2013: 323) for Kove, François (2017: 315) for Hiw, Thieberger (2006: 76) for Nafsan, Bril (2017: 222) for Nêlêmwa, Lazard and Peltzer (1991: 16–18) for Tahitian. They are another clear illustration of the omnipredicativity of Oceanic languages [§4.3].

6. Inverse-possessive predicates

The position paper contrasts two types of possessive predicates. The "plain-possessive" type starts with the possessor, and predicates the existence of some possessed item, as English *She had two baskets*; in Oceanic, these constructions are most often based on the syntax of existentials, and will therefore be examined in §8.4. As for the "inverse-possessive" type, it starts with a possessed item, and informs on the identity of its possessor – as in Eng. *This basket is hers/belongs to her*. Oceanic languages use verbless constructions here, in which the predicate is a word bearing possessive morphology.

In a typical Oceanic language, the majority of nouns belong to the "alienable", or nonrelational class. These nouns encode their possessor by means of an external linker – generally a possessive classifier (Lichtenberk 1983b, 2009) that bears personal affixes. Mwotlap has four of them, glossed 'FOOD', 'DRINK', 'CARRY' [cf. (125)] and 'POSS' ('general possession', for the default classifier). These are neither nouns nor adjectives, but form a word class of their own.²¹

(77) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002388#S163

Kē ni-tey *nō-mōmō na-ga-yō*. 3sg Ao-cook ART-fish ART-FOOD-3DU 'He cooked their fish (for them to eat).'

While possessive classifiers occur most often as adnominal possessors like in (77), they are autonomous enough that they can head a predicate of their own:

(78) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003275#S14>

Nō-mōmō a le-lo hay en, (Ø) (*na-ga-y*). ART-fish REL LOC-inside net DEIC 3SG:INAN ART-FOOD-3PL 'The fish inside the net, that (is) *for them*.'

²¹ The quasi-nominal nature of these classifiers is made evident, first, by their compatibility with the article *na*-, which is normally found only with nouns; and second, by their ability to be possessed in the same way as relational nouns.

The possessive classifier functions here as an elliptical, headless noun phrase: '(one) for them'. In other terms, (78) has essentially the same structure as (45a), except that it is elliptical of the head noun.

Lo-Toga, one of Mwotlap's neighbours, has lost its possessive classifiers, and replaced them with a general possessive linker *mi* (etymologically, a comitative preposition 'with'):

(79) Lo-Toga https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003288#S2

ē ne vegevage **mi** kemëm ^{OBL ART} speech POSS 1EXC:PL 'in our language'

Unlike the classifiers of Mwotlap, the possessive linker *mi* of Lo-Toga cannot head a predicate by itself. In order to form an inverse-possessive clause, *mi* needs to be supported by a dummy head *na* '(the) one':²²

(80) Lo-Toga <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007303#S24> Ne pu tuwtōw nie (na mi hegere wureri wereno). ART rank first 3sg DUMMY POSS HUM:PL small:PL only 'The first grade of honours, that is [one] for children only.'

The presence of the dummy head na is not specific to possession. Lo-Toga requires it whenever it forms a predicate around a nominal linker, e.g. (81) *i* 'of', or (82) *te* 'from':

(81) Lo-Toga <https://www.odsas.net/object/105090>
 Nihe (na i deda-urvë-vë-tēle).
 ЗPL DUMMY of NMLZ~make-well-OBJ-person
 'They (are) healers.' [lit. 'They (are) ones of making-people-better.']

(82) Lo-Toga https://www.odsas.net/object/105090>

Verue (**na te** Hiu). two DUMMY from Hiw

'Two of them (were) [ones] from Hiw island.'

This *na* is not a copula, because it is not restricted to predicative contexts. Rather, it serves as an empty nominal head allowing nominal modifiers (in *mi*, *i*, *te...*) to form a full noun phrase: e.g. *na minë* 'mine' [lit. 'the one of me']; *na te Hiu* 'a Hiw person'... In turn, that NP can be used either as an argument, or as a standard NP predicate – parallel to (51) above.

Most Oceanic languages behave like Mwotlap rather than like Lo-Toga, insofar as they treat their possessive markers as directly predicative, with no need of a copula or of a dummy NP head. (83) is from Tahitian:

(83) Tahitian (Vernaudon 2023:130)
 (No Pito) te va'a.
 POSS (name) ART canoe
 'The canoe (is) Pito's.'

²² Lo-Toga contrasts its noun article *ne* /nə/ (< POc *na) with a dummy noun *na* /na/ 'thing, (the) one'. The latter goes back to a former noun phrase **na vai* <ART thing>: see fn. 7 p.8.

7. Adverbial and locative predicates

Most Oceanic languages can promote an adverbial phrase to the status of predicate head – again, with no copula.

7.1. Locative (or plain-locational) predicates

In Mwotlap, a noun phrase can be used adverbially if introduced by a preposition. The latter can take the form of an affix (like the locative prefix *le-*) or of a particle (like comitative-instrumental *mi* 'with'):

(84) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S99>

Kōmyō (ta-van vēh) $l\bar{e}$ -t $q\bar{e}$. 2DU POT₁-go POT₂ LOC-garden 'You can go to the garden.'

(85) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007411#S40
 Kē (ni-kalkal) *mi* nō-qō-n.
 3sg AO-crawl~IPFV with ART-knee-3sg
 'He was crawling on his knees.'

In addition to these prepositional phrases, certain words can form an adjunct by themselves, with no extra morphology (compare Eng. *she went home*). This is the case for all toponyms, as well as for certain lexical locatives (e.g. *hēyēt* 'in the bush'):

(86) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003282#S78>

Talōwlemtap,kimi(van)hēyēt.tomorrowmorning2PLgoin.bush'Tomorrowmorning, you'll go to the bush.'

Each of these adverbial phrases, whether simple or phrasal, can also form an adverbial predicate. The most frequent are locative predicates, like (87a). Note, in passing, that the interrogative 'where' is also a verbless predicate, albeit one that can undergo *wh*-fronting.

(87a) (Ave) imam? – Kē (*lē-tqē*). / Kē (*hēyēt*). where father 3sG LOC-garden 3sG in.bush 'Where's Dad? – He (is) in the garden / He (is) out bush.'

Mwotlap has a set of six space directionals: *me* 'hither', *van* 'thither', *hag* 'up; southeast', $h\bar{o}w$ 'down; northwest', *hay* 'in; inland', *yow* 'out; seawards' (François 2015:147). These are usually found in adjunct position – as *van* in (9), *hag* in (139), or *yow* in (142a). Just like other locatives, these directional particles can also head a predicate phrase on their own:

(87b) (Ave) imam? - Kē (*hay* en).
 where father 3sG in(land) DEIC
 'Where's Dad? - He (is) out bush.' [lit. 'he (is) in there']

Place names commonly head locative predicates:

(88a) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002316, at 8'22">

Kē (*Apnōlap*). 3sg (island.name) 'She (is) on Vanua Lava.'

Unlike predicates headed by adjectives or nouns, those headed by an adverbial phrase cannot, in Mwotlap, inflect for tense, aspect, mood or even polarity.²³ Thus, while the lamitive aspect *mal* can affect verbs, adjectives or nouns, it cannot combine with an adverbial head:

(88b) *Kē (mal Apnōlap). 3sg IAM (island.name) *She is already on Vanua Lava.

In other terms, even though adverbials are as predicative as any other major constituent in Mwotlap, they form a construction of their own, whose properties differ from other predicates.

Locative predicates are common across Oceanic. (89) illustrates a postpositional predicate in Kove (Papua New Guinea):

(89) Kove (Sato 2013: 317)
 A-ghu kanika (luma yai).
 Poss-1sg basket house Loc
 'My basket (is) in my house.'

Contrary to Mwotlap, some Oceanic languages allow their adverbial phrases to inflect for TAM. East Uvean can turn the prepositional phrase *i fale* 'at home' into a predicate, and combine it with a TAM particle (here the non-past '*e*):

(90) East Uvean (Moyse-Faurie 2019: 69)
 ('E *i* fale) ia te pule.
 NPST OBL house ABS ART chief
 'The chief (is) at home.'

Tahitian has even grammaticalised a paradigm of TAM markers dedicated to locative predicates (Vernaudon 2023:140). These are *i* vs. *tei* vs. *'ei* – respectively past, present and irrealis forms of the locative preposition *i*:

- (91a) *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2023:140) (*I* uta) tō rāua fare. LOC:PAST hill ART:POSS 3DU house 'Their house *used to (be)* on the hill.'
- (91b) ('*Ei* uta) tō rāua fare. LOC:IRR hill ART:POSS 3DU house 'Their house *will/should (be)* on the hill.'

²³ To negate a locative predicate, Mwotlap uses the negative existential *tateh* – see (120).

While the locative predicates we've seen so far all function without a verbal head, many Oceanic languages encode plain-locational predicates²⁴ by means of a locative copula 'be at':

- (92) Toqabaqita (Lichtenberk 2008: 916, in Moyse-Faurie 2019: 52) Naifa nau ba=e nii fei? knife 1sg that=3sg.NFUT be.located where 'Where is my knife?'
- (93) Kokota (Palmer 2009: 214)
 Mala=na=re au ka ğahipa sarelau. footprint=3sg=those exist Loc stone there
 'Those footprints of his are in the stone there.'
- (94) Araki https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002292#S1>

Ruai,Rakiniamo=rohorovahasunOkava.before(island)3sg3sg:REAL=be.atIPFVDIREC(place)'In the olden days, Araki used to be over there, in (front of)Hog Harbour.'

7.2. Non-locative adverbial predicates

While adverbial phrases in predicate position are most often locative, non-locative adverbs are attested too.

In Mwotlap, the preposition be- 'due to, for' can form adverbials of cause or purpose:

(95) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003272#S17>

Nēk (hole) qele nen *ba*-hap? 2sg talk like Dx2 for-what 'Why are you speaking like that?'

Be- can head direct predicates, indicating the purpose of something or someone:

(96) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003310#S60>

Na-ga en, kē (**bu**-wuwuh dēmdēm). ART-kava TOP 3sG for-slap~NMLZ thought [About kava, the narcotic drink] 'Kava (is) (good) for placating anxiety.'

(97) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003275#S65 N-et vitwag, kē (*bē*-sēsēil).

ART-person one 3sG for-soothsay~NMLZ

'One of the men (was) to act as a soothsayer.' 25

²⁴ As per the position paper, plain-locational predicates (*The wine is on the table*) contrast with inverse-locational predicates (*There is wine on the table*). The latter will be examined in §8.

²⁵ Semantically, (97) is very close to the Lo-Toga sentence (81) above. The latter, however, would not fit in the present section §7.2, because the linker *i* in Lo-Toga cannot form adverbial phrases;

Another sort of causal predicate involves the clause connector *veg* 'because' (Krauße & François forthcoming). Although this is very rare, that coordinator can itself be negated – which reveals its status as a predicate head:

(98) Mwotlap (François 2005a:129) (Et= veg te) so n-eh itōk. NEG1= because NEG2 COMP ART-song be.good '(It is) not because the song is nice.'

As for the comitative-instrumental preposition *mi* 'with', it is virtually never found as a predicate in Mwotlap. Indeed, the idiomatic way to express the meaning 'be with s.o.' involves a very different construction: the predicative use of an NP headed by a dual pronoun, in an "inclusory construction" (François 2001: 384–392).²⁶ A sentence like (99) is obviously not an adverbial clause: it is rather a case of a standard NP predicate headed by a (dual) pronoun.

(99) Mwotlap (François and Howard 2000: 21)
(Kōmyō yē)? - (Kamyō Devēt).
2DU who 1EXCL:DU (name)
'Who were you with? - I was with David.'
[lit. you-two who? - we-two David.]

That said, *mi* can head a predicate in at least one case. One way to say 'be pregnant' in Mwotlap is an idiom that reads literally '(be) with her belly'. Syntactically, this takes the form of an adverbial predicate headed by the preposition *mi* 'with':

(100) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S6 Na-Iqōvēn nonon (*mi na-tqa-n*). ART-woman his with ART-belly-3sG 'His wife (was) pregnant.' [lit. She (was) with her belly.]

Hiw, a language close to Mwotlap, has a construction parallel to (100), also using the preposition mi 'with', to encode certain plain-possessive predicates ('I am with food' = 'I have food') – see (126) in §8.4. As for its neighbour Lo-Toga, it has grammaticalized the same preposition into a marker of possession in an inverse-possessive construction ('This food is with me' = 'it is mine/it is for me') – see (80) in §6.

7.3. Similative predicates

Another construction may be considered a case of an adverbial predicate. These are "similative" constructions, i.e. clauses involving a similative word 'like X'. This morpheme is often used postnominally inside an NP (e.g. *a basket like this*), but in many Oceanic languages, it can also form the head of a predicate.

it only serves inside noun phrases.

²⁶ For other accounts of inclusory constructions in Oceanic, see Lichtenberk (2000), Bril (2004, 2011).

In Mwotlap, the particle *qele* 'like' can head a predicate, equivalent of 'be like'. In (101), the presence of the subject *ino* makes it clear that what follows is a predicative constituent:

(101) Mwotlap

Ino (**qele** inēk en). 1sg:tonic sim 2sg:tonic deic 'I (am) like you.'

With an inanimate subject realized as zero [as in (31)] – similative predicates such as (102) are common in everyday speech:

(102) *Mwotlap* (François 2022b) (**Qele** anen). SIM DX2 'That's it.' [lit. '(it is) like that']

That particle 'like' has its own syntax, distinct from that of verbs, adjectives or nouns. It cannot inflect for TAM, and is only compatible with the negation:

(103) Mwotlap (François and Howard 2000: 20) (Et= **qele** te) na-lañvēn, a na-galēs en. NEG₁= SIM NEG₂ ART-(dance) SUB STA-difficult DEIC '(It is) not like the women's dance, which is so difficult.'

Similative predicates are common in Oceanic. (104) is an example from Manam:

(104) *Manam* (Lichtenberk 1983a:94) Tamoata ne-Ø paŋana-Ø (*patu* **bo?ana**). man this-3sg head-3sg stone sim 'This man's head is like a stone.' (he is stubborn)

In Teanu [§3.3], even though it is not a verb, the similative *nga* 'like' is compatible with TAM morphemes – e.g. the future particle *kape*, used here as an epistemic modalizer:

(105) *Teanu* <https://dictionaria.clld.org/sentences/teanu-XV001055>

(Kape **nga** ponu). FUT SIM DX2 'Yes, that must be it.' [lit. 'That *will* (be) *like* that.']

Whether or not they inflect for TAMP, the similative predicators of Mwotlap, Manam or Teanu do not qualify as verbs. They are thus distinct from the *similative verbs* that are found in some languages, like Nêlêmwa *shuma* 'be like, behave like':

(106) Nêlêmwa (Bril 2017: 220)
Hî ak=hleny xe (i shuma thaamwa). this man=Dx1 TOP 3sg be.like woman 'This man behaves like a woman.'

Closely linked to similative constructions are interrogatives meaning 'how'. Some Oceanic languages have an interrogative verb 'do/be how' – like Teanu *kae*, used here as a second verb in a serial construction:

(107) Teanu <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002674>
 (Kape le-te le-kae) ?
 FUT 3PL:IRR-stay 3PL:IRR-do.how
 [lit. 'they will stay they will do-how?']
 'How will they be able to live there?'

But in many languages, there is no reason to analyse the question word as a verb. It is simply an adverb in a non-verbal predicate:

(108) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007436#S43>
 (Qeleave) no-yoy?
 how ART-news
 'What's the news like?'

8. Existential and plain-possessive predicates

8.1. Existential (inverse-locational) predicates

Constructions commonly described as "existential" consist in selecting a location, whether explicitly or not, as a point of reference; and then predicating about it the presence of a referent X – e.g. *There is a cat in the garden*. In terms of the distribution of information, this is the opposite of "plain-locational" predicates such as (87a) *Dad is in the garden*; for this reason, the position paper describes existentials under the label "inverse-locational constructions". While acknowledging these authors' proposal, I will keep using here the widespread and unproblematic term "existential".

Oceanic languages grammaticalise existentials using various syntactic constructions. Occasionally, these involve lexical verbs, particularly posture verbs (Lichtenberk 2002: 270). For example, Teanu commonly uses two verbs for this purpose, namely *te* (EXIST:ANIM < 'sit, stay') for animate referents, and *wene* (EXIST:INAN < 'lie') for inanimates:

(110) Teanu https://www.odsas.net/object/103663>

Kuo ponu, iuro i-*wene*. ship that mast 3sg:REAL-EXIST:INAN 'That type of ship has a mast.' [lit. 'That ship, a mast *exists*.']

Even though *wene* is originally a lexical verb meaning 'lie, be horizontal', in (110) it has evidently lost its postural sense – since a mast is actually vertical: it has taken up a general function of existential predicate for inanimate referents (hence the gloss 'EXIST:INAN'). In Teanu, this verbal construction is the main strategy for encoding existentials, at least in the positive [see §8.5 for negative existentials in Teanu].

Several Oceanic languages encode existentials using a morpheme that is glossed 'exist', and presented as a verb in individual descriptions: see for instance Lichtenberk (1983a:498ff) on Manam, Pawley (2000: 301) on Wayan Fijian, Crowley (2006: 169) on Tape, Palmer (2009: 214) on Kokota, or Moyse-Faurie (2019) on various languages of New Caledonia. In some languages, the verbal status of that form is evident from its morphology, and confirmed by its etymology: some existential predicators are grammaticalised from a posture verb (like Teanu *wene* above), or from a verb 'stay' [cf. (3) in Xârâcùù]. Moyse-Faurie (2019: 66) also reports on a grammaticalization path {'exist' < 'do, make'} in several Kanak languages of New Caledonia.

Several languages use the same verb for their inverse-locational predicates (existentials) and their plain-locational ones [§7.1] – a verb glossed sometimes 'be at', sometimes 'exist'; see (93) au in Kokota. Finally, the few languages that have developped a verb 'have' can use it as an existential predicator: see the use of Nafsan *pitlak* in (130).

That being said, various Oceanic languages encode existential predicates using constructions that do not involve any lexical verb. Mwotlap employs a non-verbal particle $a\bar{e}$, here glossed 'EXIST' in small capitals (standing not for a verb 'exist', but for a grammatical gloss, *existential operator*):

(111) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002531#S129>
 Ne-nem (aē) Apnōlap en.
 ART-mosquito EXIST (island) DEIC
 'There are mosquitoes on Vanua Lava island.'

That particle $a\bar{e}$ [aɪ] is multifunctional in Mwotlap. It is originally an oblique adverb (François 2003a: 19), from an etymon *ai-a that incorporates a former oblique preposition *ai,²⁷ and a 3sg anaphoric suffix *-a. $A\bar{e}$, glossed OBL:ANA ("oblique adverb, anaphoric") is used for various sorts of inanimate, anaphoric adjuncts – Eng. 'to it', 'about it', 'for it', 'with it', 'at it', or 'there':

(112)MwotlapKēytēl(vēyvēygēl)aēēgēn!3TRIINTSF~quarrelOBL:ANAnow

'And so they began quarrelling about it.'

(113) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S101> Nok van le-pnō vitwag tō nok (muwumwu) ēgēn. аē 1sg go LOC-island one then 1sg work OBL:ANA now 'I can travel to an island, and then start working there.'

We saw in §7 that Mwotlap can promote its adverbial phrases to predicative function. This was evidently the path followed by $a\bar{e}$ in its grammaticalisation from an adverb (113)

²⁷ The first element of this adverb *ai-a is ultimately cognate with the oblique preposition *i* of Polynesian languages, seen in (90), (114) for East Uvean, (136b) for Tahitian.

'there' to a predicative operator (111) '(be) there'.²⁸ There is no reason to consider that $a\bar{e}$, in (111), has been turned into a verb: we are here simply dealing with an adverb use predicatively. In the typology of inverse-locational predicates (ILP) proposed by the position paper, the Mwotlap construction corresponds to the type labelled "THERE BE-ILP".

A further argument showing that $a\bar{e}$ is not a verb, is that it is incompatible with verbal morphology, such as the 3sg Aorist ni- prefix found with verbs, adjectives or nouns – e.g. (58). As we saw in (11), verbs in Mwotlap cannot head a predicate in their bare form, and must inflect for TAMP. Because the existential predicators of Mwotlap – whether positive ($a\bar{e}$) or negative (tateh, §8.3) – are uninflectable forms, they clearly stand apart from verbs.

Certain Polynesian languages followed a similar path of grammaticalization from an anaphoric locative *i ai* 'there' to an existential predicator *iai* (Chapin 1974). In this example from East Uvean, the two forms appear in a single sentence:

(114) *East Uvean* (Moyse-Faurie 2018: 306) Ne'e *iai* te fo'i 'utu *i ai*. PAST EXIST ART CLSF rock OBL ANA 'There (was) a rock there.'

The shift from *i ai* to *iai* is described by Moyse-Faurie (2018:306) as a case of "degrammaticalization": a former adverbial phrase would have been reanalyzed as a "verb" – as though it had followed an unusual path from grammar to "lexicon". However, it is not obvious that an existential operator would be lexical rather than grammatical; and it is ambiguous whether *iai* is really a verb here. In fact, the predicative status of *iai*, and even the presence of TAM marking, do not necessarily prove that *iai* has become a verb. After all, we have seen how Oceanic languages can make almost any word class predicative – whether adjectives, nouns, numerals, locatives and other adverbs, without needing to posit a derivation into a verb. One may simply see here a case of grammaticalization, as an adverb 'there', when used as a predicate head, has specialized as an existential operator – much like Mwotlap in (111).

Finally, the language Araki has three ways, all verbless, to form its existentials (François 2002:56–68). In affirmative statements, it can use an adverb *kia* 'there', or a numeral *hese* as in (76). In other clause types (e.g. questions, negative clauses), it can build its existential statement around its quantifier \bar{re} 'any' – as in (4).

8.2. Existential operators with added semantics

Some existential statements involve more marginal strategies, in which the pure existential function is enriched with extra semantics. This is how certain Mwotlap words can encode such meanings as 'there's only X', or 'there is still X'.

Thus, Mwotlap has a word vēlēs 'only, exclusively' which is often used as a postverb:

²⁸ All 15 languages in the Banks islands of Vanuatu have followed the same grammaticalisation path, from an oblique adverb to an existential (François 2005b: 492). See also Malau (2016: 378) for Vurës, François (forthcoming *a*) for Dorig.

(115) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S68>
 Nēk (haghag vēlēs) mahē vitwag.
 2sg нав~sit only place one
 'You're always sitting in the same spot.'

That word vēlēs can encode a restrictive existential, equivalent to 'there is only X':

(116) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003282#S110>

Igelōqōvēn**(vēlēs**)!Tatehtaman.HUM:PLwomanEXIST:RESTRNEG:EXman'(There were)onlywomen!There were no men.'

Likewise, the Mwotlap word lapgeto is often used as a permansive postverb meaning 'still':

(117) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S60> Ēgnō-n (ne-mtiy lapgetō). spouse-3sg sta-sleep still 'His wife was still asleep.'

But that same word can also function as an existential operator with permansive meaning, i.e. 'there is still X, there remains X':

(118) Mwotlap (François 2001: 759)
Mal bah? – O'oo, (*lapgetō*)!
IAM finish INTJ EXIST:PERM
'Is it over? – No, no, there's still some left.'

When they are used as postverbs, *vēlēs* and *lapgetō* modify the predicate head, with no existential meaning. The latter sense is only found when they head the predicate, as in (116) and (118). Each word thus has two distinct grammatical uses, which stand in a mutual relation of heterosemy (for which notion, see Lichtenberk 1991, Enfield 2006: 197, François 2017: 299).

Finally, we saw in §5 that numerals sometimes take on an existential interpretation. The ostensive or presentative constructions we'll examine in §9 can also be used as existentials.

8.3. The negative existential

The negative counterpart of $a\bar{e}$ in Mwotlap is an unanalysable particle *tateh*, glossed NEG:EX 'negative existential'. Negative existentials follow two syntactic constructions, both exemplified in (119). One construction follows a {SUBJECT – PREDICATE} syntax where the predicate phrase consists of *tateh* alone; this is much parallel to the positive existential $a\bar{e}$ in (111). The other construction has the target noun incorporated to the predicate phrase, yielding *tateh* $b\bar{e}$ 'there is no water', or (116) *tateh* $ta\bar{m}an$ 'there were no men':

(119) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007413#S325 Nē-bē (**tateh**) me gōh. (...) Le-pnō gōh, (**tateh** bē)! ART-water NEG:EX hither DX1 Loc-island DX1 NEG:EX water 'There's no water here. In this island, there's no water!' The etymology of *tateh* is unknown, but it is definitely not a verb – regardless of its translations – because it is not compatible with verbal morphology. Besides its meaning as a negative existential, this word has various other uses. If the subject is semantically definite, *tateh* can mean 'be absent', or serve to negate locative predicates like (87)–(88):

(120) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007409#S69> Tateh! Kē (tateh) gōh. no 3sg NEG:EX DX1 'No, he (is) not here.'

Tateh can be used alone as a negative answer 'no', as in (120); it is employed in some polite contexts meaning 'don't worry'; and so on. The array of uses attested in Mwotlap for the negative existential is shared by many Oceanic languages, in Vanuatu (François 2011: 219–221, forthcoming *a*) and beyond.

In Mwotlap, existential operators (positive or negative) do not normally inflect for TAM; yet such a possibility is found in other Oceanic languages. For example, Xârâcùù can combine its negative existential "verb" *siè* (Moyse-Faurie 2019:59) with a perfective particle, yielding a meaning 'there is no more':

(121) Xârâcùù (Moyse-Faurie 2019: 59)
 Wâ siè laasi.
 PFV not.exist rice
 'There is no more rice.'

Just like for positive existentials, Araki encodes its negative existential using a construction $je-\bar{r}e$ that includes no verb (François 2002: 164–165); it combines the standard negation je with the partitive quantifier $\bar{r}e$ 'any' – see (4). And yet, even though it is a verbless construction, it can encode modality through its subject clitic, and even aspect [e.g. the Perfect $\bar{r}e$ in (123)]:

(122) Araki (François 2002: 165)

Nko (pa raju tilavono), (jo= **je-re** no-m hina). 2sg FUT man poor 3sg:IRR= NEG-QTF POSS-2sG thing 'You will become a poor man, you will not have anything.'

(123) Araki https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002294#S20 (Mo = re je-re no-no paua). 3sg:REAL= PFT NEG-QTF POSS-3sg power 'The (devil's) power has disappeared.'

In sum, while existential predicates are sometimes expressed by verbs [e.g. (110), (130)], many Oceanic languages resort to non-verbal strategies (111)–(123).

8.4. Plain-possessive predicates

Section 6 already examined one type of possessive predicate, namely the "inversepossessive constructions", from Possessee to Possessor. We will here examine the other type, labelled "plain-possessive"– that is, the relation that goes from Possessor to Possessee, equivalent to 'A has X'. The most common pattern is to derive the construction from an existential: so, 'I have X' is literally '*There is my X*'. This is why these constructions are discussed here, after the presentation of existential constructions [\$8.1-8.3]. In Mwotlap, it is common to find a possessed noun phrase in the position of subject of an existential predicate (either $a\bar{e}$ or its negative counterpart *tateh*):

(124) Mwotlap https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003262#S76 Ithi-k (aē), ña Apnōlap. Ba ithi-k (tateh) me gōh. brother-1sg EXIST DIST (island) but brother-1sg NEG:EX hither DX1 'I have a brother over there on Vanua Lava. But I have no brother here.'

(125) Mwotlap <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007436#S68> Ba n-ih na-mu (aē)? – Óòó, n-ih na-mu-k (tateh). but art-bow art-carry:2sg exist intj:no art-bow art-carry-1sg neg:ex 'Do you have a bow? – No, I don't have a bow.'

The possessor may be marked on the noun itself if it belongs to the inalienable class (e.g. *ithi-k* 'my brother'), or on an external possessive classifier if the noun is alienable (e.g. *na-mu-k* 'my [carried] item') – see §6. That minor difference aside, the plain-possessive constructions (124) and (125) have the same structure.

Many Oceanic languages encode their plain-possessive predicates in the same way as Mwotlap, by deriving them from an existential construction: see (122)–(123) in Araki, (134) in Tahitian.

Hiw forms its plain-possessive predicates quite differently, using a construction labelled "comitative-possessee type" in the position paper – namely, a pattern {he (is) with X}:

(126) Hiw https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003252#S46>

lke önwe), ike (*mi* ne vöte marërë), (mi n' 2sg with ART house 2sg with ART garden many ike (**mi** ike sōgë ne ga), (mi ne pusune)... 2sg with ART kava numerous 2sg with ART pig 'You have a house, you have many gardens, you have some kava, you have numerous pigs ... '

With its preposition 'with' as head of a predicate, the syntax of (126) is parallel to (100) we had seen in Mwotlap; but only Hiw can use this construction in a plain-possessive predicate. Interestingly, we had seen how Lo-Toga had grammaticalised the same preposition *mi* 'with' into an inverse-possessive linker – see (79) in §6. In other terms, to quote the typology in the position paper, Hiw builds upon an "S-possessor" pattern {*You (are) with a house*}, whereas its neighbour Lo-Toga exploits the reverse "S-possessee" logic {*A house (is) with you*}.

Teanu also follows an "S-possessee" logic when it encodes its plain-possessive predicates as { *s.th. exists with me* }. In doing so, it uses a posture verb such as 'lie' [cf. (110)] or 'stand':

- (127) Teanu https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003350#S17>
 Dapa noma, uro peini ngaten' motoro i-wen' tev' dapa.
 3PL before soot for thing heavy 3sG-EXIST:INAN by 3PL
 'Our ancestors used to have soot for performing magic.'
 [lit. 'soot for supernatural activities existed by them']
- (128) Teanu <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003353#S25> Na vilo engaiote! Vilo pon i-vio teve kiapa tae. Dx1 plant different plant Dx2 3sg-stand by 1INCL:PL NEG 'How weird is this plant! We don't have it (in our island).' [lit. 'that plant doesn't stand by us']

Bivalent verbs equivalent to English 'have' (called "transpossessive constructions" by the position paper), well represented in Romance or Sinitic, are extremely rare in Oceanic. One such language is Nafsan, which has developed a verb *pitlak* 'have' (Thieberger 2006: 272), etymologically from *pi atlak* 'be owner'.

(129) Nafsan (Thieberger 2006: 262) Ag ku=pitlak ntaewen. 2sg 2sg:REAL=have knowledge 'You have knowledge.'

That verb 'have' serves also as an existential predicator:

(130) *Nafsan* (Thieberger 2006: 200) I=*pitlak* namor e-maloput. 3sg:REAL=have hole LOC-middle 'There is a hole in the middle.'

Another case of transpossessive structure is when a language borrowed a verb 'have' from one of the pidgin languages spoken in their area. For example, Solomon Islands Pijin has a verb *garem* 'have' (Jourdan 2002: 57), originally from English *got 'em*, which Teanu borrowed as a verb *karem* (François 2021):

(131)	Teanu		<https: dictionaria.clld.org="" sentences="" teanu-xv000625=""></https:>			
	Ebele	kuo	i- <i>karem</i>	demene.		
	genuine	canoe	3sg:real-have	outrigger		
	'Genuine canoes have an outrigger.'					

In modern Teanu, this bivalent syntax tends to compete with the more typical Oceanic construction, illustrated in (127), involving existentials.

8.5. When existentials and ascriptives are coexpressed

In a minority of Oceanic languages, existential predicates employ the same syntax as ascriptive ones. For example, we saw above that Tahitian uses a particle *e*, glossed INC for 'inclusive', for its ascriptive predicates – see (67) or (132a):

(132a) *Tahitian* (Vernaudon pers. com.) (E pape) tēna. INC freshwater DX2 'That's (fresh)water.' [ASCRIPTIVE]

If the subject is itself anchored in space – e.g. *te-i uta* 'that (which is) inland' – the ascriptive interpretation gives way to an existential reading:

(132b)	Tahitian		(Vernaudon 2023:127)		127)					
	∢ Ε inc	<i>pape</i> > freshwater	te-i art-obl	uta inla	a. and					
	[lit. '	[lit. 'that which is inland is water']								
	'The	[EXISTENTIAL]								
(133)	Tahitian		(Vernaudon 2023:15		157)					
	∢ Ε inc	<i>naonao</i> > mosquito	te-i _{ART-OBL}	terā _{DIST}	motu. island					
	'There are mosquitoes on that island.'						[EXISTENTIAL]			

This coexpression between ascriptive and existential is also found in possessive clauses:

(134) Tahitian (Vernaudon 2023:139)
(E piti tamari'i) t-ā rāua.
INC two child ART-POSS 3DU
[lit. 'Theirs are two children.']
'They have two children.' [PLAIN-POSSESSIVE]

The only clue that points to an existential reading, in sum, is when the subject explicitly refers to a location or to a possessor. In the absence of such indications, a predicate in e + N remains ambiguous:

(135) Tahitian (Vernaudon 2023:129) (E 'ori-ra'a). INC dance-NMLZ a) 'It is a dance.' [ASCRIPTIVE] b) 'There is a dance.' [EXISTENTIAL]

That said, even though Tahitian uses the same constructions for ascriptives and existentials in the positive, it contrasts them formally in the negative, via two separate negative predicates. Ascriptive predicates take a negative operator *e'ere* (similar to Lo-Toga *deda* in §4.2.1):

(136a)	Tahitian		(Vernaudon 2023:129)			
	〈E'ere〉	i	te	ʻori-raʻa.		
	NEG:COP	OBL	ART	dance-NMLZ		
	'That is not a dance.'					[NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIVE]

As for existentials, they require a different negator '*aita* (Lazard and Peltzer 1991:22; Vernaudon 2023:132):

(136b) *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2023:129) (*'Aita*) e 'ori-ra'a. NEG:EX INC dance-NMLZ 'There is no dance.' [NEGATIVE EXISTENTIAL]

Teanu shows the reverse situation: it contrasts ascriptives from existentials in the affirmative, but coexpresses them in the negative. Indeed, Teanu uses the same clause-final negation *tae* for a negative ascriptive (137a) and for a negative existential (137b):

(137a) *Teanu* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003351#S165>
(Tepakola tae). monster NEG
'(It is) not a monster.' [NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIVE]
(137b) Tepakola (tae). monster NEG
'There is no monster.' [NEGATIVE EXISTENTIAL]

While (137a) and (137b) are both non-verbal predicates, they differ in their syntactic constituency – as indicated by the brackets around the predicate phrase. In (137a), *tepakola* heads a noun (SNP) predicate, which bears the negation *tae*. In (137b), the noun is the subject, and the negation constitutes the predicate itself.

Languages co-expressing ascriptives and existentials are a minority in Oceanic. Most distinguish them formally, like Mwotlap does. Thus compare the negative ascriptive (138a) – parallel to (37) above – with the negative existential (138b):

Other than being both verbless predicates, (138a) and (138b) clearly differ in their syntax.

9. Ostensive predication

Ostensive constructions, as defined in the position paper, consist in drawing the addressee's attention towards the presence of a given referent in the situation of utterance.

Mwotlap has two types of ostensive markers. One is a morpheme *ete*, originally from the imperative of the verb *et* 'see' + the deictic e(n). This form is quite comparable to French *voici*, both in its make-up and in its function:

(139) *Mwotlap* (François and Howard 2000: 4)

(**Ete** n-ēm mino) a *hag gēn*, a isqet n-ēmyoñ *en*. OST ART-house my FOC east DX3 FOC near ART-church DEIC '*Here* (is) my house up over there, next to the church.'

This ostensive particle *ete* is in fact optional; what makes this utterance ostensive is, first and foremost, the presence of further deictic material, such as the directional *hag* 'east' and the demonstrative gen 'over there'. The latter is a demonstrative of the third grade DX3 [fn.13 p.15], which is inherently ostensive – see (41).

The other ostensive morpheme *vatag* serves to locate a referent in motion; I propose to gloss it 'Kinetic ostensive' (OST:KIN). The kinetic ostensive, like the static *ete*, is always followed by a directional and a demonstrative. Literally, (140) reads "Here's my father, (moving) *hither* with respect to you [*anen*]".

(140) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002531#S88> Imam mino (*vatag*) *me* anen! father my OST:KIN hither DX2 'There comes my father!'

The directional encodes the vector of the motion, either with respect to speech act participants (*me* 'hither', *van* 'thither'), or to absolute coordinates [see (87b)]:

(141) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007408#S77>

Ige me-lep kē, ba kēy (**vatag**) yow le-lam anen. HUM:PL PFT-take 3sg and 3PL оsт:кім seawards LOC-ocean DX2 'They've abducted [your wife], and they're on their way out to the ocean.'

In spite of its predicative position, the kinetic ostensive *vatag* in (140)–(141) does not qualify as a verb, because it is incompatible with verbal morphology in the language. That said, *vatag* commonly combines with verbs, as it has grammaticalised as a TAMP marker. The function of this marker, labelled "Kinetic presentative", is to point to a subject moving in space²⁹ as the action unfolds at the time of utterance:

(142a) Kēy (*lak* **vatag**) yow anen. 3PL dance PRSV:KIN seawards DX2 'They're (dancing) on their way to the sea.' [KINETIC PRESENTATIVE]

The Kinetic presentative in $\{V+vatag\}$ contrasts with the Static presentative in $\{V+t\bar{o}\}$, whose role is to locate a subject in a static location:

(142b)	Kēy	(lak	tō〉	yow	anen.	
	3pl	dance	PRSV:STC	seawards	dx2	
'They're (dancing) over there by the s					e sea.'	[STATIC PRESENTATIVE]

²⁹ The Kinetic presentative vatag has also grammaticalised into an aspect marker – a type of iamitive – in Mwotlap and its neighbours (François 2003a: 158–162); but this goes beyond the present study.

The two presentatives belong to the TAMP paradigm of the language (François 2003a: 139– 162): they fill the TAMP slot, and are exclusive of any other TAMP marker. This is coherent with their semantics, which combines spatial specification with imperfective aspect.

In a presentative, the informational focus is the subject's spatial location, while the verb is always background information. Mwotlap's presentatives offer a *de facto* alternative to the plain-locational predicates we saw in §7.1 – with an extra indication of the posture or action in which the subject is engaged at the moment of utterance. When the subject is indefinite as in (143), the presentative is equivalent to an existential (inverse-locational) statement:

(143) *Mwotlap* https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007408#S113>

Hiqiyig (*tig* **to**) hay en! someone stand PRSV:STC inland DEIC 'There's someone (standing) over there.'

The two ostensive strategies of Mwotlap – verbless and verbful – have in common that the ostensive morpheme itself (whether *ete*, $t\bar{o}$ or *vatag*) is separate from the demonstratives. Some Oceanic languages have markers that incorporate the deictic information. For example, Hiw has two ostensive markers, *ëte* vs. *ëne*, respectively speaker-centered (DX1) and addressee-centered (DX2):

(144)	Hiw		<https: 10.24397="" doi.org="" pangloss-0003256#s101=""></https:>					
	Ne	metu	meron	eñot	ëte	v'	ay!	
	ART	coconut	dry	one	OST:DX1	IPFV	float	
	'Loc	ok, a dry c	oconut fl	oating	[here clos	e to m	ne]!'	

(145) Hiw <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003256#S186>
Pa ëne ga owuw!
and ost:Dx2 FOOD:2sg Inocarpus
'There [close to you], some chestnuts for you!'

In Tahitian, the correspondence is transparent between, on the one hand, its three ostensive particles *eie* (OST:DX1) – $en\bar{a}$ (OST:DX2) – $er\bar{a}$ (OST:DX3), and on the other hand, the demonstrative triplet *teie* (DEM:DX1) – *tenā* (DEM:DX2) – *terā* (DEM:DX3):

(146a)	Tahitian		(Vernaudon 2023:155)	
	⟨ Erā⟩ ost:dx 3	te ART	paoti. boss	
	' <i>There</i> 's t	he bo	ss.'	[OSTENSIVE PREDICATE]
(146b)	Tahitian		(Vernaudon 2023:155)	
	⟨ Terā ⟩ dem:dx3	te _{ART}	paoti. boss	
	'The bos	s, thať	's him.'	[DEMONSTRATIVE PREDICATE]

10. Synthesis

This overview of a few Oceanic languages described the various constructions that fall under the category of "non-verbal predicates" – as defined in this volume's position paper. They form a constellation of syntactic constructions that prove diverse across the family – and are sometimes diverse within a single language. For the sake of length as well as internal consistency, this study focused on the system of one language, Mwotlap (Vanuatu), taken here as representative of Oceanic as a whole. Yet whenever specific constructions showed structural diversity in the family, other languages were cited.

One crucial property of Oceanic languages, well represented in Mwotlap, is that they tend to be *omnipredicative*: that is, all major word classes can head a predicate, with no need to be derived into a verb, or resort to a copula. As shown in Table 3, virtually all word classes in Mwotlap (with the exception of lexical postverbs) can head a *standard predicate* – i.e. a predicate that is unmarked from the point of view of tense, aspect or modality. The second column shows that certain predicative constructions – those headed by adjectives, nouns or numerals – even allow the predicate to inflect for TAM, in the same way as verbs.

	Can head a standard predicate with no verb or copula	Can inflect for TAM, with no verb or copula	See
Lexical postverb	_	—	§2
Adjective	\checkmark	✓	§3
Noun	✓	✓	§4
Numeral	✓	✓	§5
Possessive	✓	_	§6
Adverb, locative	\checkmark	_	§7
Existential operators	\checkmark	_	§8
Ostensive operators	1	_	§9

Table 3 – Summary: Non-verbal predicates in Mwotlap, by word class

Unlike Mwotlap, several Oceanic languages did develop some forms of copulas, yet these remain rare overall: they are attested in a handful of languages, out of 500. And when they exist, copulas are often restricted to specific contexts: some languages have a copula only in case of a negation, or only when the predicate inflects for TAM. Nafsan and Lelepa are quite exceptional in having developed a full-fledged verbal copula *pi* 'be' [§4.3], generalised to all non-verbal predicates. Beyond copulas, verbal operators are more common in locative predicates, whether plain-locational ('stay, sit' \rightarrow 'be at') or inverse-locational ('be at' \rightarrow 'exist, be there'); some Oceanic languages even have verbs for meanings such as 'be like', 'do how' or 'be where'. That said, even in these domains, the typical behaviour is to stick to verbless strategies.

In sum, through its propensity to treat almost any word as predicative, and its thorough preference for verbless strategies, Mwotlap constitutes an extreme example of the tendencies that characterise the Oceanic family as a whole.

Abbreviations

1excl	first person exclusive	LOC	locative
1INCL	first person inclusive	NCCL	non-conclusive deictic
ABS	absolutive	NEG:EX	negative existential
ADJ	adjective	NMLZ	nominalizer
ANA	anaphoric	NONDUM	nondumitive, 'not yet'
ANP	anchored noun predicate	NPST	non-past tense
AO	aorist	OBJ	object marker
APPR	apprehensive mood	OBL	oblique marker
ART	article	ORIG	originative prefix
ASCR	ascriptive predicate	OST	ostensive
ATTR	attribute prefix	PERS	personal article
CARRY	possessive classifier, items carried	PFT	perfect
CCL	conclusive deictic	PFV	perfective
CLSF	classifying particle	POSS	possessive marker
COMP	complementizer	POT	potential
COP	copula	PROSP	prospective aspect
DEIC	deictic	PROX	proximal deictic
DIREC	directional	PRT	preterite
DIST	distal demonstrative	PRSV	presentative
DUMMY	dummy noun	QTF	quantifier
DX1	demonstrative, speaker-centered	REAL	realis mood
	(≈proximal)	REC.PST	recent past
dx2	demonstrative, addressee-centered	REL	relativiser
	(≈distal)	RESTR	restrictive
dx3	demonstrative, ostensive	REVERS	reversive
EQUAT	equative predicate	SIM	similative
EXIST	existential predicator	SNP	standard noun predicate
FOC	focus particle	STA	stative aspect
FOOD	possessive classifier, items eaten	STC	static presentative
HAB	habitual	SUB	subordinator
HUM	number marker for humans	TAM	tense, aspect, mood
IAM	iamitive aspect	TAMP	tense, aspect, mood, polarity
ID	identification (equative)	TINP	tense-inflected noun predicate
INC	inclusive predicate	TONIC	tonic pronoun
INTSF	intensifier	ТОР	topic marker
IPFV	imperfective	UNIT	units above 10
IRR	irrealis	VB	verb
KIN	kinetic, encoding motion	VC	verb complex

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