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28 Non-verbal predicates in Oceanic languages

Abstract: Oceanic languages, much like the rest of Austronesian, show a propensity to do without any copula when encoding their non-verbal predicates. Their typical profile is "omnipredicative": most of their word classes (adjectives, nouns, pronouns, numerals, adverbs ...) can head a predicate directly, with no need to resort to verbal strategies. Many classes are even "tamophoric", i.e. can inflect for Tense–Aspect–Mood. This overview of Oceanic languages builds around the system of Mwotlap (Vanuatu), a radical example of these grammatical tendencies. Overall, the Oceanic family reminds us that the properties [predicative] and [tamophoric] are not a privilege of verbs, but can be associated, in principle, with just any word class.

1 Non-verbal predicates in Oceanic languages: Introduction

This overview of non-verbal predicates in the Oceanic family will follow the general approach outlined by Creissels, Bertinetto, and Ciucci (Chapter 1, this volume).

Among the 1,270 languages of the vast Austronesian phylum, about 500 belong to the Oceanic family (Lynch, Ross, and Crowley 2002). Although they are today spoken across the whole Pacific, they all emerged from the diversification of Proto Oceanic (POc), spoken about 3,200 years ago, off New Guinea. Oceanic languages are more or less diverse depending on the domain: they are unanimous in encoding clusivity in their personal pronouns, and in providing them with at least three numbers; yet their typical word order varies: SOV dominates in Western Oceanic, SVO in Vanuatu, VOS in New Caledonia, VSO in Polynesian.

When it comes to non-verbal predicates, Oceanic languages resort to different strategies. Thus, Lelepa (Central Vanuatu) has a verbal copula *pi*:[1]

1 Throughout this chapter, the limits of the predicate constituent will be indicated, whenever relevant, using pointy brackets ⟨...⟩.

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(1) *Lelepa* (Lacrampe 2014: 163)
⟨E=*pi* naure kiki nae⟩.
3SG=COP island small 3SG.POSS
'It was his small island.'

But the Dorig language of north Vanuatu forms its non-verbal predicates merely through juxtaposition (François, forthcoming):

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

These two syntactic patterns, however, are not equally distributed. Verbal copulas as in (1) are a rarity in Austronesian: the default pattern is for non-verbal predicates to lack any copula, as in (2). Indeed, in most Oceanic languages, all major word classes – including nouns, numerals, pronouns, possessive classifiers, adpositions, locatives or other adverbials – can head a predicate, with no need of special morphology. To quote the concept coined by Launey (1994) for Classical Nahuatl, most Oceanic languages are *omnipredicative*.

The main grammatical overviews of the Oceanic family (e.g. Pawley 1973; Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002; Ross 2004) tend to concentrate on nominal and verbal morphology, and say little about non-verbal predicates per se. Only a few publications focus explicitly on non-verbal clauses – e.g. Ross (1998) and van Lier (2017a) on adjectives and property words; François (2004) on noun predicates; Moyse-Faurie (2019) on locative and existential constructions.

For reasons of space, it is impossible to fully describe 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 languages. The ones mentioned in the present study are shown in Figure 1, and listed in (3).

(3) The 21 languages mentioned in this study:
Papua N. Guinea: Mn – Manam; K – Kove
Solomons: Ko – Kokota; To – Toqabaqita; Te – Teanu
North Vanuatu: H – Hiw; Lt – Lo-Toga; M – Mwotlap; D – Dorig; A – Araki
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

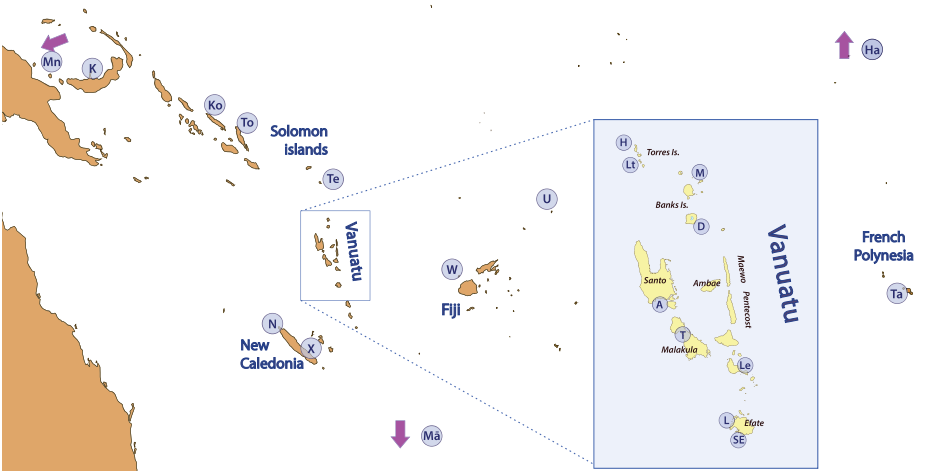

Figure 1: Location of the Oceanic languages cited in this study.

For the languages underlined in (3), the sources are my personal fieldwork (e.g. François 2001, 2003, 2005b for Mwotlap; 2002 for Araki; 2005a, 2011 for Torres-Banks languages; 2021 for Teanu). In all examples below, a DOI link will refer to my text corpora in the open-access *Pangloss* archive.

Among the languages of our sample, Mwotlap (north Vanuatu) is an example of pure omnipredicativity. All its word classes are potential predicates without extra morphology: this is a radical illustration of the most canonical structures found across Oceanic. This chapter will thus take Mwotlap as the backbone of our areal typology: every subsection will begin by examining the syntactic patterns in that language, before situating them in their broader Oceanic context.

After a presentation of verbal clauses [§2], we will examine different subtypes of non-verbal predicates: property words and adjectives [§3]; nominal predicates, both equative and ascriptive [§4]; numerals [§5]; possessive predicates [§6]; locative and adverbial predicates [§7]; existential [§8] and ostensive clauses [§9].

2 Verbal predicates

Mwotlap's default order for all clauses, whether verbal or non-verbal, is *Subject–Predicate*.[2] Case is not marked morphologically, but by the position of arguments in the clause. Word order is highly constrained, and consistently SVO; alignment is accusative. The subject of non-verbal predicates is always coded in the same way as S, the sole argument of intransitive verbal clauses.

2 We'll discuss an exception in §4.1.3.

The internal syntax of verbal clauses in Mwotlap revolves around a constituent that the Oceanic tradition (e.g. Durie 1988) calls the *verb complex* [VC]. The VC consists minimally of a verb (the head), optionally followed by one or more postverbal modifiers (François 2005b: 139): e.g. a second verb in a serial pattern, or a lexical "postverb" (a modifier specialised in the postverbal position). The VC in (4), shown here between pointy brackets ⟨...⟩, includes a verbal head *van* 'walk' and a postverb *yeghuquy* 'casually':

(4) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007411#S123>

N-et	⟨tit=	***van***	*yeghuquy*	vēhte⟩$_{VC}$	van	lē-vētan	en.
ART-person	NEG:POT$_1$=	walk	casually	NEG:POT$_2$	DIREC	LOC-land	DEIC

'One cannot walk casually into that piece of land.'

By definition, lexical postverbs are restricted to that head-modifying function; they are the only word class of Mwotlap that cannot head a predicate. (If a postverb is also attested as a predicate head, it is reanalysed as a lexical verb.)

Markers of tense, aspect and mood are affixes or particles attached to the lexical elements of the VC. A characteristic of North Vanuatu languages (not general in Oceanic) is that negative polarity is incorporated in the TAM paradigm – which must thus be renamed "TAMP" (tense, aspect, mood, polarity).[3] Mwotlap has a unique paradigm of 26 TAMP morphemes (François 2003: 37, 2005b: 133): these are unanalysable, portmanteau morphemes, whether simple or complex, that encode together TAM semantics and polarity.

TAMP morphemes surface in two slots in the clause, labelled here TAMP$_1$ and TAMP$_2$, which surround the lexical elements of the VC:

(5) Structure of a verbal clause in Mwotlap:
subject ⟨ **TAMP**$_1$ VERB (postverbs) **TAMP**$_2$ ⟩$_{VC}$ *object* adjuncts

One slot TAMP$_1$ opens the VC; the second slot TAMP$_2$ closes it, preceding the object and other complements. Some morphemes fit in TAMP$_1$ (e.g. Perfect *me-*, Future *te-*);[4] others in TAMP$_2$ (e.g. the presentative *vatag* in (102)). Some are discontinuous morphemes with one element in each slot, such as the Negative potential *tit*= ... *vēhte* 'cannot' in (4).

In fact, the slot of the predicate head in (5) need not be a verb: as we'll soon see, it can be filled by any major word class – except a lexical postverb.

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

4 Following conventions advocated by Haspelmath (2010: 674), this chapter will capitalise the names of grammatical categories when they are specific to a particular language.

In Mwotlap, a verb can only head a predicate if it inflects for TAMP – e.g. the iamitive *mal* in (6). This requirement is also shared by adjectives [§3.1].

(6) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S116>

**Tita*	*qañyis*.		Tita	⟨**mal**	qañyis⟩.
mother	cook		mother	IAM	cook
**Mum cook*.			‘Mum has cooked already.’		

Even though Tahitian is a VSO language, the verb complex in (7) shows an internal syntax ⟨TAM *verb* postverbs⟩ that is rather parallel with (5):

(7) *Tahitian* (Lazard and Peltzer 1991: 11)

⟨Nō	*‘ite*	noa	atu	ra⟩$_{VC}$	vau	iā-na.	
REC.PST	see	only	DIREC	DEIC	SBJ:1SG	OBJ-3SG	

‘I have just seen him.’

3 Adjectival predicates

3.1 Adjectives vs. verbs: similar but different

Oceanic languages vary in the way they treat property words. Some have two distinct classes (Ross 1998; Lichtenberk 2005): a few “pure adjectives”, used only as noun modifiers; and an open class of “adjectival verbs”, which can be either attributes or predicates. Mwotlap only has the latter type.

So-called “adjectival verbs” contrast with other verbs in their ability to modify a noun in an NP, with no need of a relative clause. Compare the Mwotlap adjectival verb *d[i]lig* ‘murky’ with the stative verb *m[i]tiy* ‘sleep, be asleep’:

(8) *Mwotlap*

nē-bē	dilig	≠	**nē-nētm̃ey*	*mitiy*
ART-water	murky		ART-child	sleep
[ADJ] ‘murky waters’		≠	[v] **a sleeping child*	

This grammatical behaviour is sufficient to contrast two word classes. While many authors describe property words as a subtype of verbs, it is more economical to just label them “adjectives” (François 2003: 52, 2017: 314). Simply, while adjectives and verbs form two separate classes, their contrast is neutralised in predicate position – a pattern typical of Oceanic at large (van Lier 2017a: 1275).

In Mwotlap, a predicative adjective implies the presence of a TAMP marker – just like verbs. The adjective *d[i]lig* in (9) can take the same aspect prefix as the stative verb *m[i]tiy* in (10), namely the Stative *ne-*:

(9) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007411#S49>
Nē-bē **ne**-nlig.
ART-water STA-murky
'The water is/was murky.'

(10) *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 (9)–(10), the only way to identify the word class of the predicate head is to run a syntactic test such as (8). If we accept my proposal to assign *d[i]lig* to a category of "adjectives" (rather than "adjectival verbs"), then (9) qualifies as a non-verbal predicate, but (10) does not.

In terms of etymology, the stative markers of North Vanuatu (Mwotlap /nɛ-/, Löyöp /nyɛ/...) reflect a former dummy noun *na ɣai (ART thing).[5] Thus, a structure like (9) was originally based on an NP predicate {N+Adj}, literally "The water (is) *thing* murky", with an underlying syntax parallel to the nominal clauses we'll see in §4.1.2. The same path was followed by Tahitian with the construction {*mea* +Adj}: what was originally a noun *mea* 'thing' used predicatively has grammaticalised into a stative aspect (Vernaudon 2011; 2023: 208).

(11) *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2011: 327)
⟨E **mea** *rahi*⟩ te fare.
INC thing/STAT big ART house
'The house is big.'

3.2 When adjectives inflect for TAM

The Stative aspect corresponds to the default situation, when a property is assigned to the subject at a given point in time (past or present),[6] without reference to a change of property. For example, (9) may equally describe a temporary state or a permanent property.

5 Dummy nouns will be mentioned again in §6, for Lo-Toga, under the form *na* (<*na ɣái).

6 Mwotlap does not encode tense (François 2003: 39–43): thus (9)–(10) may translate 'is' or 'was'.

Crucially, Mwotlap adjectives are compatible not just with the Stative aspect as in (9), but with any of the 26 morphemes that form the TAMP paradigm (François 2003: 47–53). Combining an adjective with a non-stative TAMP marker triggers a dynamic reading. Thus, while the Stative *ne-* (surfacing as *na-* through vowel harmony) in (12) assigns the property 'red' without implying any change of state, the Perfect *me-* (*ma-*) in (13) explicitly presents the property as a resultant state, and hence refers to a change-of-state event 'turn red':

(12) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002511#S12>
Nō-yōtēnge ***na-lawlaw***.
ART-leaf STA-red
'The leaves *are red*.'

(13) *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.'

Whether the property word receives a stative reading (*be P*) or a dynamic one (*turn P*), most Oceanic languages simply inflect the lexeme using their TAMP morphology – the same one they use with verbs. Their class of adjectives is therefore not only predicative, but also *tamophoric* (François 2004: 185, citing a term coined by Tournadre 2004) – i.e. capable of hosting Tense–Aspect–Mood inflection. As a corollary, typical Oceanic languages not only do without a copula 'be' as in (12), but also without a verb 'become', as in (13).[7]

The combination of adjectives with dynamic TAMP markers encodes semantic contrasts that English would rather express lexically. Thus, taking *het* 'bad', compare the readings of the Stative *ne-* (14a) with that of the Apprehensive mood *tile* (14b):

(14) a. *Mwotlap* [AF.AP2.055]
Na-trak mino **ne**-het.
ART-car my STA-bad
a) 'My car is of poor quality.' [PERMANENT STATIVE]
b) 'My car is out of order.' [TEMPORARY STATIVE]

7 Some dictionaries of Austronesian 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 a general behaviour of all property words, and should not need to be spelled out for every adjective in the lexicon.

b. Na-trak mino **tile** het.
ART-car my APPR bad
[Lit. 'My car might (*turn*) *bad*.']
'My car might break down.' [EVENT]

Negating an adjectival predicate involves the same negation as verbs (e.g. realis negation *et*= ... *te*), following the structure in (5):

(15) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003282#S33>
Ikē wun ⟨***et***=*malaklak* ***te***⟩ so kamyō so leg.
3SG maybe NEG_1=happy NEG_2 COMP 1EXCL:DU PROSP marry
'Maybe she's not happy that we're getting married.'

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; this is common in Oceanic. A less typical situation is found in Teanu (Temotu subgroup, Solomon Islands), where adjectives and verbs remain distinct even in predicative contexts.

3.3 Two separate word classes: The case of Teanu

In order to form a predicate, Teanu verbs require a prefix – a portmanteau form that combines modality (realis vs. irrealis) with subject indexing (François 2021):

(16) *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.'

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

(17) *Teanu* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003351#S76>
Menuko ia-kia ***ka*** ***li***-tomoe.
friend POSS-1INCL:DU **PFT** 3PL:REAL-disappear
'Our friends have vanished.'

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

(18) *Teanu* <https://dictionaria.clld.org/sentences/teanu-XV000981>
Bele voro ini ⟨*jiejie*⟩. / **i-jiejie*
skin stingray 3SG rough 3SG:REAL-rough
'The skin of stingrays is rough.'

Teanu thus clearly distinguishes adjectives from verbs even in predicate phrases. The assignment of lexemes to these two classes is not always predictable based on their meaning: while the word *mimione* 'dry' is an adjective, its antonym *dobuo* is a verb '[be] wet', because it requires a subject prefix in predicate position (François 2021).

Although they do not take the subject-and-mood prefix, Teanu adjectives remain compatible with other TAM particles. For example, *moso* 'ripe' can form a 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'). (19) shows TAM markers (*ka*, *kata*, *kape*) both with prefixed verbs (*maili*, *vene*) and unprefixed adjectives (*kokoro*, *vitoko*, *moso*):

(19) *Teanu* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003351#S108>
Vongoro ***ka*** *kokoro* ponu, ka avtebe adapa ***ka*** ***i-maili***
almond PFT dry TOP and taro their PFT 3SG:REAL-grow
i-vene ***kata*** ***ka*** *vitoko* ***kape*** *moso*.
3SG:REAL-go.up IAM PFT close FUT ripe
'The almonds had dried up. As for their taros, they had grown so much that they were almost ripe already.' [Lit. '... their taros have grown$_{VB}$ up$_{VB}$, it *has already* (*become*) close$_{ADJ}$ that they *will* (*be*) ripe$_{ADJ}$.']

In sum, Oceanic languages usually have a class of adjectives (or adjectival verbs) that formally differ from (other) verbs. That contrast manifests itself at least through their behaviour inside NPs (e.g. Mwotlap), but also, sometimes, in predicate position (e.g. Teanu). And yet, despite these distributional differences, adjectives are predicative and tamophoric – just like verbs.

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 Chapter 1) vs. equative ones ("identity statements"). The Wayan variety of Fijian, for example, has two different copulas (Pawley 2000). *Tia* is used with ascriptive predicates:

(20) a. *Wayan Fijian* (Pawley 2000: 312)
⟨Ei *tia* qasenivuli⟩ o Tevita.
3SG:NPST be:ASCR teacher PERS (name)
'Tevita is a teacher.' [ASCRIPTIVE]

The copula *ni-* is reserved to equative predicates:

(20) b. ⟨Ei *ni-a* na qasenivuli⟩ o Tevita.
3SG:NPST be:EQUAT-3SG ART teacher PERS (name)
'Tevita is the teacher.' [EQUATIVE]

The two types of predicates are also distinguished in some Polynesian languages (§4.3.2). That said, a more general tendency among Oceanic languages is to treat them 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 NP, with no extra morphological material:

(21) *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.'

(22) *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.'

This construction – reminiscent of (2) in nearby Dorig – is sometimes called *zero* copula (Stassen 1994; Lemaréchal 1997: 23–25), and labelled "juxtaposition construction" in Chapter 1. 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 $\{\text{SUBJ}_{\text{NP}}\ \langle\text{PRED}_{\text{NP}}\rangle\}$.

Mwotlap uses this direct construction for ascriptives, as in (21)–(22), but also for equative clauses:

(23) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002492#S3>
Iqet e, ēgnō-n ⟨*Rōlēy*⟩.
(name) TOP spouse-3SG (name)
'As for Ikpwet, his wife (was) Rōlēy.' [EQUATIVE]

When a human referent is topicalised or otherwise activated in discourse, it is indexed with a 3SG anaphoric pronoun *kē*, as in (21); but when [-human], it is usually indexed through zero anaphora. As a corollary, a well-formed Mwotlap declarative sentence may simply consist of a [-human] NP, preceded by a zero subject. Rather than the label "juxtaposition", such constructions are better described as *direct nominal predicates*, where "direct" refers to the absence of any copula or overt predicator:

(24) a. *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S38>
(∅) ⟨*nē-qētqoqo*⟩.
3SG:INAN ART-gecko
'(It) (is) a gecko [=kind of lizard].'

All examples so far showed nouns prefixed 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 nouns[8] require the presence of the article to form a valid NP – whether it is used as an argument (subject, object...) or as a predicate. For common nouns that require *na-*, a predicate cannot consist of the noun alone:

(24) b. *⟨*Qētqoqo*⟩.
gecko
**(It is) a gecko.'*

A predicate NP may include the same modifiers as any argument NP: attributive adjective (21), originative modifier (22), possessor (30), etc. In addition, being a predicate head, a direct nominal predicate can also include so-called "postverbs" – or more accurately, modifiers of the predicate head – like the restrictive *ēwē* 'just' in (24c):

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

8 The only nouns that do not take the article *na-* are proper nouns as in (23), as well as a subset of [+human] nouns that behave like them (François 2005b: 122–126), such as kin terms: e.g. (23) *ēgnō-* 'spouse', (39) *imam* 'father'.

In principle, any well-formed NP can be a predicate. But when the head is a personal pronoun (implying an equative reading: *it's me*), it must belong to the set of tonic pronouns, phonologically heavier than the light pronouns used to encode arguments. In Mwotlap, a light pronoun like 3SG *kē* can only be used as an argument; a direct NP predicate requires the independent pronoun *ikē*, which is used in "tonic" contexts (stressed argument, topic, predicate):

(25) *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!'

Certain content questions – whether in direct or reported speech – are NP predicates:

(26) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003310#S31>
No et= ēal te so (∅) ⟨*na-hap*⟩.
1SG NEG$_1$= know NEG$_2$ 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 (15)] – still with no copula:[9]

(27) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S71>
Nēk ⟨et= *qētqoqo* te⟩!
2SG NEG$_1$= gecko NEG$_2$
'You (are) not a gecko!' [NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIVE]

(28) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007436#S197>
⟨Et= *inēk* te⟩.
NEG$_1$= 2SG:TONIC NEG$_2$
'It (is) not you.' [NEGATIVE EQUATIVE]

The negation of standard noun predicates (*It is not N*) is distinct from negative existentials, of the type *There is no N* [see §8.1, §8.4].

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

4.1.3 Anchored noun predicates

An alternative strategy for NP predicates in Mwotlap involves a deictic anchor in final position. This anchor is usually a demonstrative:

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

(30) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S13>
⟨Ēgnō-n⟩ anen.
spouse-3SG DX2
'That (is) his wife.' [EQUATIVE PREDICATE]

In (29)–(30), if the predicate were the deictic, these clauses would be a form of "ostensive" construction [see §9], so (30) would translate 'Here is his wife' or 'His 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),[10] but the ostensive deictic *gēn* (glossed 'DX3'), optionally supported by the ostensive particle *ete* [§9]. In that case, the deictic would indeed be the predicate:

(31) (Ete) ēgnō-n ⟨*gēn*⟩.
OST spouse-3SG DX3
'Here is his wife.' / 'His wife is here.' [OSTENSIVE PREDICATE]

Contrary to the ostensive clause (31), the function of (30) is not to locate a referent in space, but to define its nature, i.e. answer the question "What/Who is that?". This reading is also evident in (32):

(32) *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!'

10 Mwotlap 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, 2005b: 142).

The correct analysis is thus to say that the predicate in (30) or (32) is really the initial NP. This interpretation is confirmed by observing the syntax of the negation. The negator (*et= ... te*) will affect not the final demonstrative, but the initial NP:

(33) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003272#S85>
⟨Et= *imam* *nōnōm* te⟩ gōh.
NEG$_1$= father POSS:2SG NEG$_2$ DX1
'This (is) not your father.' [NEGATIVE EQUATIVE]

These constructions are noun predicates like the ones in §4.1.2, but of a different syntactic type. I will label it *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.

On the one hand, the SNP conforms to the standard constituent order {(topic) SUBJECT + PREDICATE}: although a [-human] subject can be realised as zero as in (24a), arguably the subject slot is still present clause-initially on an abstract level. The ANP, by contrast, is unusual in being the only construction of Mwotlap that systematically lacks a subject slot, and must begin with the predicate:

(34) Constituent order in an *anchored noun predicate*
→ {PREDICATE + ANCHOR}

The presence of the clause-final anchor is incompatible with the expression of a subject, even [+human] (which cannot be zero-encoded):

(35) a. Kē ⟨ēgnō-n⟩.
3SG spouse-3SG
'She is his wife.' [SNP – Standard noun predicate]
b. **Kē* ⟨*ēgnō-n*⟩ *anen.*
3SG spouse-3SG DX2
**'She is his wife there.'* [ANP – Anchored noun predicate]

In sum, the ANP construction (30) cannot be seen as a mere variant of an SNP: it is a different syntactic construction altogether. The clause-final demonstrative cannot be analysed, strictly speaking, as a postposed subject or posttopic, because it is not an NP, and would be ungrammatical as an argument (topic or subject). At best, the

demonstrative indexes the underlying subject in space or discourse – a function that I describe as *deictic anchor*.[11]

The ANP construction is restricted to nominal predicates: it can only be headed by a noun, a pronoun, or a possessive classifier [§6]. Just like SNPs, ANPs can form ascriptive predicates (29) as well as equative ones (30). Only the equative interpretation is possible when the predicate is a personal pronoun:

(36) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S83>
Ba tita! ⟨*Ino*⟩ agōh!
but mother 1SG:TONIC DX1
'But Mum! This (is) me!'

ANPs are common in Oceanic, yet described under other names – e.g. "presentational identificational sentences" in Toqabaqita (Lichtenberk 2008: 941). They also occur in the English-based creole Bislama, where (30) and (36) would translate respectively as (30') and (36'):

(30') *Bislama*
⟨Woman blo hem⟩ ia.
woman POSS 3SG DEIC
'That's his wife.'

(36') ⟨Mi⟩ ia.
1SG DEIC
'It's me.'

In these Bislama examples, the predicate phrase ⟨...⟩ ends with prosodic prominence, whereas the final deictic *ia* (<Eng. *here*) is systematically unstressed, and uttered with a downstep typical of post-focus position: (36') /ˆmi ˈi̱a/. This is reminiscent of a posttopic, with the peculiarity that the deictic *ia* is not a well-formed NP, and hence would be ungrammatical as a (post)topic: it only exists as a post-predicate anchor, in a subjectless ANP construction. In this respect, Bislama has strictly calqued its Oceanic substrates.

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

11 A similar construction in English would be the non-verbal predicate "⟨*Tom*⟩ *here.*", uttered on the phone, as an equivalent to *This is Tom ~ I am Tom.*

(37) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S72>
⟨Igni-k⟩ inēk!
spouse-1SG 2SG:TONIC
'You're my wife!'

At first glance, one might think that *igni-k* 'my wife' in (37) is the subject, and *inēk* 'you' (being a tonic pronoun) is the predicate – with a literal reading 'my wife, that's you' [cf. (25)]. Besides prosody, the ambiguity can again be solved through the negation test (38):

(38) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002298#S72>
⟨Et= *igni* te⟩ ino!
NEG_1= spouse:2SG NEG_2 1SG:TONIC
'I am not your wife!'

Exceptionally, the anchor can be a full NP, with its own deictics. Again, the position of the negation in (39) indicates clearly which NP is the predicate vs. the anchor:

(39) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003262#S59>
⟨Et= imam nōnōm te⟩ imam mino en.
NEG_1= father POSS:2SG NEG_2 father POSS:1SG DEIC
'My father (is) not your father.'

(39) is the only construction where the anchor could be mistaken for a posttopic – an interpretation disfavoured by the impossibility of a preceding pause, and the absence of posttopics elsewhere in the language.

4.2 TAM-inflected noun predicates

The noun predicates examined so far – whether SNP or ANP clauses – involved aspectually and modally unmarked statements. But what happens with semantically dynamic NP predicates?

4.2.1 A copula for TAMP-marked clauses?

Even when a language can do without a copula for noun predicates, it often requires one when tenses and aspects other than the simple present are involved – as in Russian or Arabic. This typological tendency verifies in at least 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 ñwōdōl*) or in the negative (*tate pero*):

(40) *Lo-Toga* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003283#S35>
Ne vegevage pi gerite ⟨*tate pero*⟩, ⟨*na ñwōdōl* wereño⟩.
ART story about octopus NEG long STA short just
'The story of the octopus isn't long, it's quite short.'

And just like Mwotlap, it uses the juxtaposition strategy for standard noun predicates:

(41) *Lo-Toga* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003292#S45>
Nike ⟨ne tēle⟩ hitë nike ⟨ne ñwië⟩?
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 (42) – or is negated (43):

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

(43) *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 **daɣo* 'do, make' (François 2005a: 494), which has grammaticalised into an auxiliary forming causatives [see (66)], and also into a copula 'be, become'. In addition, the combination *tate da* [ˌtatəˈtˢa] ⟨NEG+COP⟩ in (43) has coalesced into a negative copula *deda* [tˢəˈtˢa], which works as its synonym:

(43') *Lo-Toga* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003283#S29>
⟨***Deda*** *gerite*⟩.
NEG:COP octopus
'It *was not* an octopus.' [NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIVE]

Through these innovations, Lo-Toga now has two copulas: *da* for TAMP-inflected NP predicates like (42)–(43), and a dedicated copula *deda* for negative NP predicates like (43').

But while these facts are consistent with typological tendencies, they are not representative of their family. Only a minority of Oceanic languages have developed a verb 'be' [see §4.3.1], and Lo-Toga is an exception in North Vanuatu.

4.2.2 TAMP-inflected noun predicates in Mwotlap

We saw in §3.2 how Mwotlap adjectives are "tamophoric", i.e. can combine with TAMP inflection. Its nouns behave the same: whenever a nominal property is temporally, aspectually or modally unstable, the noun will combine with TAMP particles in the same way as verbs. Indeed, although verbs, nouns and adjectives constitute distributionally distinct word classes, they all share the same behaviour in the context of tamophoric predicates.[12]

Unlike its neighbour Lo-Toga, Mwotlap needs no copula for its noun predicates, even when they inflect for TAMP. (44) shows a series of predicates in the Perfect aspect, one headed by a noun (*lōmgep* 'young man, youngster'), others by adjectives (e.g. *bōybōy* 'sturdy'):

(44) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003282#S75>

Na-taybe-n	Vēnvēntey	e	kē	⟨mi-*lwo*⟩	ēgēn,	kē	⟨mō-***lōmgep***⟩		
ART-body-3SG	(name)	TOP	3SG	PFT-big	now	3SG	PFT-youngster		
a	hēywē!	Kē	⟨mō-*bōybōy*⟩,	na-taybe-n	⟨mē-*wē*	a	mē-*wē*⟩!		
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.'

With such examples, one might be tempted to see a conversion (zero-derivation) from noun ('youngster') into verb ('become a youngster') – in which case we would be dealing here with a verbal predicate after all. In reality, *lōmgep* in (44) continues to be a noun even when combined with the morphology typically associated with verbs, because all nouns in this language are tamophoric. Compared with direct noun predicates {*X (is) N*}, the "semantic increment" (Evans and Osada 2005: 371) inherent in this construction can always be compositionally calculated based on the semantics of the

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

TAMP morpheme. The most economical analysis is thus to consider that "TAMP-inflected noun predicates" (TINP) are headed by a noun.[13]

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; cf. Nordlinger and Sadler 2004: 778). That said, in a naturalistic corpus, TAMP inflection is mostly found with those nouns whose meaning is compatible with modal or aspectual instability (François 2003: 53–72; cf. Tonhauser 2006: 174). This is true, for example, of stages in life ('child', 'adult', 'old man' ...) as in (44), or the growth stages of a plant or animal. Nouns referring to social status ('friend', 'son-in-law' ...) or occupation are eminently aspect-compatible:

(45) *Mwotlap* [AF-AP09-48a]
Nok ⟨so *tēytēybē ne gatgat*⟩.
1SG PROSP healer of language
'I'd like to (*become a*) *linguist*.' [ASCRIPTIVE TINP]

In all examples cited so far, TAM inflection corresponds to ascriptive predicates, in which the subject itself evolves in time; the property N is valid at a given date, but invalid at another date – e.g. a person who was once a child becomes a young man. More rarely, a TINP can also correspond to an equative clause. This is clear when the predicate is a personal pronoun:

(46) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007414#S85>
⟨Et= *ikē* qete⟩ nen.
NONDUM_1= 3SG:TONIC NONDUM_2 DX2
[*watching out for her father, as several people come by*]
'That (is) not him yet.' [EQUATIVE TINP]

The predicative *ikē* we had seen in (25) was a simple SNP, equating two referential NPs ('X=Y') with no reference to time. But in (46), *ikē* inflects for the nondumitive TAMP category *et= ... qete* 'not yet',[14] which places the equative predication in a temporal perspective.

13 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. This happens in Mwotlap only with a few kinship terms (François 2004: 192).

14 The nondumitive phasal aspect (François, forthcoming) is named after Latin *nondum* 'not yet'.

4.2.3 A hidden copula?

In Mwotlap, nominals can inflect for TAMP only when predicative; this differs from the languages that allow nominal tense also for argument NPs – e.g. 'their former/future teacher' – as in Tupi-Guarani (Tonhauser 2006; Bertinetto 2020). One could propose, then, that TAMP inflection is precisely what renders Mwotlap nouns predicative. TINPs would then correspond to the "predicative inflection construction (IIIa)" defined in Chapter 1, whereby the TAM marker itself could be analysed as a form of copula.

However, I believe such an analysis would not pay justice to the facts of Mwotlap. If TAM inflection were analyzed as a functional copula, this would blur the contrast between the direct construction (44) and the actual copula *da* (42) that Lo-Toga has innovated. But more importantly, the demand for consistency would force us to acknowledge that this so-called "TAM copula" is required not only by nouns and adjectives, but also ... by verbs – since verbs too need TAM inflection to form a valid predicate [§2]. If we accept that TAM inflection is not a "copula" for verbs, then it should not be analysed that way either for adjectives or nouns. The key to a pure omnipredicative system is that nouns and verbs fill exactly the same slot, with no morphology whatsoever that would create an asymmetry between the word classes.

One possible proposal would say that TAM inflection constitutes the underlying syntactic head of all TAM predicates – whether verbal or nominal – in a way reminiscent of the INFL/IP node of X-bar theory (Chomsky 1981). At least, this analysis would faithfully represent the strictly identical way in which verbs, adjectives and nouns form their TAM clauses in omnipredicative languages, using the same operators. Nouns in Mwotlap are just as predicative, and as tamophoric, as verbs – with no reason to view those two properties as inherently verbal.

4.3 Copulas and their rarity among Oceanic languages

4.3.1 The lack of copula, a strong tendency in the Pacific

Many Oceanic languages present, like Mwotlap, an *omnipredicative* profile – one in which all major word classes can head a predicate, with no need of extra morphology. 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). The debate about the noun/verb contrast in Oceanic languages (Broschart 1997; Moyse-Faurie 2005; van Lier

2016, contributions in van Lier 2017b; Bril 2017) has yielded a consensus, that verbs and nouns do form separate word classes after all, but that they also share the ability to head a predicate with no copula.

To take random examples across the family, (47) illustrates an equative SNP in Manam, (48) an ascriptive SNP in Tape, (49) an ascriptive ANP in Nêlêmwa, (50) a TINP in Kokota:

(47) *Manam* (Lichtenberk 1983a: 451)
ŋe-∅ ⟨*ategisi wauwau*⟩.
this-3SG teacher new
'This is the new teacher.'

(48) *Tape* (Crowley 2006: 166)
Netite vës esen ⟨*tëvëlëkh*⟩.
child little POSS:3SG girl
'Her little child was a female.'

(49) *Nêlêmwa* (Bril 2017: 221)
⟨*Caan*⟩ hoona.
Lethrinus DX2
'That (is) a Lethrinus [fish species].'

(50) *Kokota* (Palmer 2009: 273)
Ḡetu ⟨*n-e-ke mane datau*⟩.
(name) REAL-3SG-PFV man chief
'Getu was the chief [at that time].'

These qualitative observations are confirmed by the GramBank typological database (Skirgård et al. 2023). Table 1 analyses GramBank's feature GB117: "*Is there a copula for predicate nominals?*",[15] and focuses on the languages for which an answer (yes/no) is provided. On a global scale, copulas are preferred by the majority of the world's languages, namely 56.8% of the GramBank sample (1152/2029) – and 66.6% if we remove Austronesian. Pacific languages show the opposite tendency, favouring copula-less languages: this is true at the level of the Oceanic family (77.0%), of the Austronesian phylum (81.1%), and of the macro-area "*Papunesia*" (Austronesian + Papuan) more generally (77.8%).

15 Link: *https://grambank.clld.org/parameters/GB117*.

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

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 %
world minus AN	1896	1612	1073	539	**66.6 %**	33.4 %
“Papunesia”	726	599	133	466	22.2 %	**77.8 %**
Austronesian (AN)	511	417	79	338	18.9 %	**81.1 %**
Oceanic	275	235	54	181	23.0 %	**77.0 %**

4.3.2 The different types of Oceanic copulas

Languages with copulas are a minority in Oceanic, but they do exist. We saw in §4.2.1 that Lo-Toga has developed a verbal copula *da* for TINP clauses. In Central Vanuatu, Nafsan (South Efate) has gone one step further, generalising the use of a verbal copula for all non-verbal predicates (Thieberger 2006: 173–174, 270–273):

(51) *Nafsan* (Thieberger 2006: 174)

Nafnag	nen	⟨i=*ta*	**pi**	nafnag	wi	*mau*⟩.
food	that	3SG.REAL= NEG_1	**be**	food	good	NEG_2

‘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). Lacrampe (2014: 238–242) reports on a similar copula *pi*/*fi* in neighbouring Lelepa [see (1)]. Early (1994: 320–321) describes a copula verb *pe*/*ve* in nearby Lewo, cognate with *pi*/*fi*. These copulas originate from a verb ‘make, do’— which is reflected in Araki *vei* ‘make, do’ (François 2002).

In another region, Pawley (2000) shows that Wayan Fijian presents not one but “two *be*’s”, respectively for equative and ascriptive noun predicates [§4.1.1].

Polynesian languages present a less clearcut picture. They lack any copula verb; but they do not use the juxtaposition strategy as commonly as in other Oceanic languages. In Tahitian, where the standard order is {Predicate – Subject} [see (7), (11)], equative noun predicates can, in principle, be expressed by juxtaposition:

(52) *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.’

However, this structure is not the only one found in Tahitian (Vernaudon 2023: 151), where equative predicates are often preceded by an optional particle *‘o*:

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

Although *'o* is optional, it is quite frequent in marking the predicate phrase in equative clauses, and Vernaudon (2023: 151) glosses it EQ for "equative copula". But, contrary to the 'be' verb of Nafsan, this *'o* copula of Tahitian is not a verb, nor is it obligatory.

Tahitian forms ascriptive predicates using a particle *e*, sometimes glossed INC for "inclusive" (i.e., ascriptive):

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

That *e* disappears in TINP constructions. A sentence like (55) confirms that Tahitian nouns are inherently predicative since they do not require a copula to form a predicate:

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

The particle *e* is cognate with Māori *he*, which Bauer (1997) glosses "classifying particle" (CLSF):

(56) *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) concluded that *'o* is a "copular preposition", and *he* an "indefinite determiner". In the latter interpretation, the particle would be comparable to the Mwotlap article *na-*, which is normally present in noun predicates [see (24b)] without being a copula. In sum, depending on their ability to appear in other contexts, it is unclear whether the particles found in Polynesian NP predicates (*'o, he, e*) have yet fully grammaticalised as (non-verbal) copulas.

Table 2 recapitulates the four main grammatical profiles we saw. 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 the encoding of noun predicates in Oceanic.

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

5 Numeral predicates

Mwotlap commonly uses numerals adnominally as in (57a), but also predicatively as in (57b). The linear order is identical in the NP (57a) and the clause (57b): the difference in syntactic constituency is marked by prosody.

(57) a. *Mwotlap*
na-yño-n vēvet
ART-leg-3SG four
'its four legs'

b. *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.']

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

(58) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003273#S65>
Na-lo ⟨***soñwul***⟩.
ART-sun ten
'It (is/was) ten o'clock.'

Like nouns, numerals are tamophoric:

(59) *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].'

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

Ni-siok	m-atlō,	mi-***vitwag***,	mō-***vōyō***,	ni-siok	mē-***vētēl***,
ART-ship	PFT-appear	PFT-one	PFT-two	ART-ship	PFT-three
ni-siok	mē-***vēvet***.				
ART-ship	PFT-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, and take the same TAMP prefixes. In this respect, they behave like adjectives and nouns. That said, Mwotlap numerals are distinct from verbs, insofar as they can form direct predicates (57)–(58) – a construction that is unavailable to verbs [see (6)]. By contrast, Araki numerals can be analysed as a subclass of verbs, because they systematically inflect for subject and mood in the same way as verbs (François 2002: 81–89):

(61) *Araki* (François 2002: 155)

Ř̃aju	⟨*mo*=	*hese*⟩	lo	ima	ř̃uř̃unu.
person	3SG:REAL=	one	LOC	house	cook

[Lit. 'Person *is one* in the kitchen.'] 'There is someone in the kitchen.'

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 Possessive predicates

Chapter 1 contrasts two types of possessive predicates. The "plain-possessive" type says something about the possessor, as in *She has two baskets*; in Oceanic, these constructions are most often based on the syntax of existentials, and will be examined in §8.3. The "inverse-possessive" type predicates about the possessed item, as in *This basket is hers*. 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 non-relational 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. (91)] and 'POSS' (the default possessive classifier):

(62) *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).'

Possessive classifiers form a word class of their own.[16] While they are most often adnominal as in (62), they are autonomous enough to head a predicate (63). The classifier functions here as an elliptical, headless NP: '(one that is) theirs [to eat]'. In other terms, (63) has essentially the same structure as (35a), except that it is elliptical of the head noun.

(63) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003275#S14>
Nō-mōmō a le-lo hay en, (∅) ⟨*na-**ga**-y*⟩.
ART-fish SUB LOC-inside net DEIC 3SG:INAN ART-FOOD-3PL
'The fish inside the net, [that is] *theirs* (= it's for them).'

Lo-Toga, one of Mwotlap's neighbours [§4.2.1], has replaced its possessive classifiers with a general possessive linker *mi* (also a comitative preposition):

(64) *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, Lo-Toga's possessive linker *mi* 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':[17]

(65) *Lo-Toga* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007303#S24>
Ne pu tuwtōw nie ⟨***na*** ***mi*** *heqere* *wureri* wereño⟩.
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 derives a predicate from an adnominal linker, e.g. (66) *i* 'of', (67) *te* 'from':

16 The quasi-nominal nature of these classifiers is made evident by their compatibility with the article *na-* and with possessive suffixes; and by their participation in ANP constructions [§4.1.3].

17 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 NP *na ɣái <ART thing>: see fn. 5.

(66) *Lo-Toga* <https://www.odsas.net/object/105090>
Nihe ⟨***na*** ***i*** *de~da-urvë-vë-tēle*⟩.
3PL DUMMY of NMLZ~make-well-OBJ-person
'They (are) healers.' (Lit. 'They (are) [ones] *of making-people-better*.')

(67) *Lo-Toga* <https://www.odsas.net/object/105090>
Verue ⟨***na*** ***te*** *Hiu*⟩.
two DUMMY ORIG 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 adnominal modifiers (introduced by *mi*, *i*, *te* ...) to form a full NP: 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 (41) 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 even a dummy NP head. Thus, inverse-possessive predication in Tahitian would take the form (68), similar to (63):

(68) *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2023: 130)
⟨***Nō*** Pito⟩ te va'a.
POSS (name) ART canoe
'The canoe (is) Pito's.'

7 Adverbial and locative predicates

Many Oceanic languages can promote an adverbial phrase to the status of predicate head.

7.1 Locative predicates

Chapter 1 contrasts "plain-locational" predicates (*The wine is on the table*) with "inverse-locational" predicates (*There is wine on the table*) – for which, see §8. Some languages encode plain-locational clauses by means of a locative verb 'be at':

(69) *Kokota* (Palmer 2009: 214)
Mala=na=re *au* ka ḡahipa sarelau.
footprint=3SG=those be.at LOC stone there
'Those footprints of his are in the stone there.'

However, many other languages remain true to the family's predilection for non-verbal strategies, and allow verbless locative predicates. (70) illustrates a postpositional predicate in Kove (Papua New Guinea):

(70) *Kove* (Sato 2013: 317)
A-ghu kanika ⟨*luma* ***yai***⟩.
POSS-1SG basket house LOC
'My basket (is) in my house.'

In Mwotlap, a locative adjunct may consist of a prepositional phrase (e.g. *lē-tqē* 'in the garden', *apwo ep* 'above the fire'), or a locative lexeme (e.g. *Numea* 'in Nouméa'; *hēyēt* 'in the bush'). Each of these adverbial phrases[18] can form a locative predicate, like (71):

(71) ⟨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) in the bush.'

The interrogative *ave* 'where' in (71) is also a verbless predicate, albeit one that can undergo *wh*-fronting. Placenames commonly head locative predicates:

(72) a. *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 are not tamophoric in Mwotlap.[19] Thus, while the Iamitive aspect *mal* can modify verbs, adjectives or nouns, it cannot combine with a locative head (72b). In other terms, although adverbials are as predicative as other major word classes in Mwotlap, they form a construction of their own.

18 As a word class, the (VP-external) adverbs of Mwotlap are strictly distinct from (VP-internal) postverbs [§2].

19 To negate a locative predicate, Mwotlap uses the negative existential *tateh* [§8.2].

(72) b. **Kē ⟨mal Apnōlap⟩.*
3SG IAM (island.name)
**She is already on Vanua Lava.*

Adverbial predicates are tamophoric in some languages. East Uvean can use the prepositional phrase *i fale* 'at home' as a predicate combined with a TAM particle (here, the Non-past *'e*):

(73) *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 portmanteau paradigm of TAM-marked locative predicators (Vernaudon 2023: 140). These are *i* vs. *tei* vs. *'ei* – respectively past, present and irrealis forms of the locative preposition *i*:

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

7.2 Non-locative adverbial predicates

Non-locative adverbs are attested too. In Mwotlap, the preposition *be-* 'due to, for', prefixed to nouns or to nominalised verbs, forms adverbials of cause or purpose – e.g. *ba-hap?* 'what for, why?'. That same *be-* can head a predicate, indicating the purpose of something or someone:

(75) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007272#S1>
Na-kaka gōh, ikē ⟨***be**-tmat Weywey*⟩.
ART-story TOP 3SG for-spirit Weywey
'This myth (is) *about the Weywey spirit*.'

(76) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003275#S65>
N-et vitwag, kē ⟨***bē***-*sē*~*sēil*⟩.
ART-person one 3SG for-NMLZ~soothsay
'One of the men (was) *to act as a soothsayer*.'[20]

Another sort of adverbial predicate involves the clause connector *veg* 'because'. That coordinator can itself be negated, thereby revealing its status as a predicate head:

(77) *Mwotlap* (François 2005b: 129)
⟨Et= ***veg*** te⟩ so n-eh itōk.
NEG_1= because NEG_2 COMP ART-song be.good
'(It is) not because the song is nice.'

7.3 Similative predicates

Yet another kind of adverbial is the "similative" 'like X' (Haspelmath and Buchholz 1998). Similative phrases can be used as a clause adjunct (e.g. *She sang like him*) or adnominally (e.g. *a basket like this*); in many Oceanic languages they can also head a predicate, equivalent of 'be like X'. This is the case with Mwotlap *qele*:

(78) Ino ⟨***qele*** inēk en⟩.
1SG:TONIC SIM 2SG:TONIC DEIC
'I (am) like you.'

With an inanimate subject realised as zero [cf. (24a)], similative predicates such as (79) are common in everyday speech:

(79) ⟨***Qele*** *anen*⟩.
SIM DX2
'That's it.' [Lit. '(It is) like that.']

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

(80) *Mwotlap* (François and Howard 2000: 20)
⟨Et= ***qele*** te⟩ na-lañvēn, a na-galēs en.
NEG_1= SIM NEG_2 ART-women's.dance) SUB STA-difficult DEIC
'(It is) *not like* the women's dance, which is so difficult.'

20 Semantically, (76) is very close to the Lo-Toga sentence (66) above. The latter, however, would not fit in §7.2, because Lo-Toga's linker *i* cannot form adverbial phrases; it only serves inside NPs.

Copulaless similative predicates are common in Oceanic. In Teanu, the similative *nga* 'like' is tamophoric. In (81), the future *kape* [see (19)] serves as an epistemic modaliser:

(81) *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 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':

(82) *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 (François 2021):

(83) *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. Just like *ave* 'where' in (71), *rākevtaye* in (84) is simply an adverb heading a non-verbal predicate:

(84) *Hiw* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003256#S29>
⟨*Rākevtaye*⟩?
how
[Lit. 'How (are things)?'] 'What's up?'

8 Existential and plain-possessive predicates

8.1 Existential predicates

Existentials involve various syntactic constructions across Oceanic. Occasionally, these employ lexical verbs, particularly posture verbs (Lichtenberk 2002: 270). Teanu uses two verbs for this purpose: *te* (EXIST:ANIM < 'sit, stay') for animates, and *wene* (EXIST:INAN < 'lie') for inanimates:

(85) *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 (85) it has 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 affirmative [see §8.4 for negative existentials].

Many Oceanic languages encode existentials using a morpheme that authors gloss 'exist', and present as a verb: 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' – e.g. *nöö* in Xârâcùù. Moyse-Faurie (2019: 66) also reports on a grammaticalisation path {'make, do' > 'exist'} in several languages of New Caledonia.

Some languages use the same verb for their inverse-locational predicates (i.e. existentials) and their plain-locational ones [§7.1]. That verb is sometimes glossed 'be at', sometimes 'exist'; see (69) *au* in Kokota. Finally, the few languages that have developed a verb 'have' can use it as an existential predicator: see Nafsan *pitlak* in (94).

That said, various Oceanic languages encode existentials using strategies that do not involve any lexical verb. For example, 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 (61). In other clause types (questions, negative clauses), it can build its existential predicates around its quantifier *r̄e* 'some, any':

(86) *Araki* (François 2002: 154)
⟨**R̄e** paniavu⟩ lo ima r̄ur̄unu?
QTF pineapple LOC house cook
'(Is there) any pineapple in the kitchen?'

Mwotlap employs a non-verbal particle *aē*, here glossed 'EXIST' (standing for *existential operator* rather than a verb 'exist'):

(87) *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.'

That particle *aē* [aɪ] is multifunctional in Mwotlap. It is originally an oblique adverb (François 2005b: 128) glossed OBL:ANA ("oblique adverb, anaphoric"), and used for various sorts of inanimate, anaphoric adverbs – Eng. 'to it', 'for it', 'about it', 'with it' or 'there':

(88) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002300#S101>
Nok van le-pnō vitwag tō nok ⟨muwumwu⟩ *aē* ēgēn.
1SG:AO go LOC-island one then 1SG:AO 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 *aē* in its grammaticalisation from an adverb (88) 'there' to a predicative operator (87) '(be) there'.[21] There is no reason to surmise that *aē*, in (87), has been turned into a verb: it is just an adverb used predicatively. Besides, the existential predicators of Mwotlap – whether positive (*aē*) or negative (*tateh*, §8.2) – clearly stand apart from verbs, because they cannot inflect for TAM.

8.2 Negative existentials

The negative counterpart of *aē* in Mwotlap is an unanalysable particle *tateh*, glossed NEG:EX 'negative existential'. It follows two equivalent constructions, both shown in (89):

(89) *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!'

21 All 15 languages in the Banks islands of Vanuatu have followed the same grammaticalisation path, from an oblique adverb to an existential (François 2005a: 492); see also Malau (2016: 378) for Vurës, François (forthcoming) for Dorig. Certain Polynesian languages followed a similar path of grammaticalisation from an anaphoric locative *i ai* 'there' to an existential predicator *iai* (Chapin 1974; Moyse-Faurie 2018: 306).

The first construction follows a {SUBJECT – PREDICATE} syntax where the predicate phrase consists of *tateh* alone; this is parallel to the positive existential *aē* in (87). In the second construction, the argument of the existential is incorporated to the predicate phrase, unprefixed, in the slot used by incorporated objects (François 2005b: 137).

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. When its subject is semantically definite, *tateh* can mean 'be absent', or serve to negate locative predicates like (71)–(72); it is the word for 'No!', etc. The array of its uses is shared in Vanuatu (François, forthcoming) and beyond.

Araki encodes its negative existential using a construction *je-rē* that includes no verb (François 2002: 164): it combines the standard negation *je* with the partitive quantifier *rē* 'any' – see (86). And yet, although it is a verbless construction, it encodes modality through its subject clitic, and can even inflect for aspect – e.g. the Perfect *rē* in (90):

(90) *Araki* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002294#S20>
⟨*Mo=* *rē* ***je-rē*** no-no paua⟩.
3SG:REAL= PFT NEG-QTF POSS-3SG power
'The [devil's] power (is) no more.'

In sum, while existential predicates are sometimes expressed by verbs [e.g. (85), (94)], Oceanic languages also commonly resort to non-verbal strategies (86)–(90).

8.3 Plain-possessive predicates

In §6, we discussed "inverse-possessive constructions", from Possessee to Possessor ('X is mine'). Let us now examine "plain-possessive" predicates – i.e., the relation that goes from Possessor to Possessee ('I have X'). In Oceanic, the most common pattern is to derive them from an existential: so, 'I have food' is literally '*There's my food*'. This is why these constructions are discussed here, after the presentation of existential constructions [§8.1–8.2].

In Mwotlap, it is common to find a possessed NP[22] in the position of subject of an existential predicate (either *aē* or *tateh*):

22 The possessor may be marked on the noun itself if it belongs to the inalienable class – e.g. *igni-**k*** 'my wife' in (37), *na-yño-**n*** 'its legs' in (57) – or on an external possessive classifier if the noun is alienable [see §6] – e.g. (91) *na-mu-**k*** 'my [carried] item'.

(91) *Mwotlap* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0007436#S68>
Ba *n-ih* *na-mu* ⟨**aē**⟩? – Óòó, *n-ih*
but ART-bow ART-carry:2SG EXIST INTJ:no ART-bow
na-mu-k ⟨**tateh**⟩.
ART-carry-1SG NEG:EX
'Do you have a bow? – No, I don't have a bow.'

Many Oceanic languages encode their plain-possessive predicates in the same way as Mwotlap, by deriving them from an existential construction: see (90) in Araki, (96) in Tahitian. Hiw forms its plain-possessive predicates quite differently though, using a construction that Chapter 1 labels "comitative-possessee type" – namely, a pattern {*he (is) with X*}:

(92) *Hiw* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003252#S46>
Ike ⟨***mi*** n' öñwe⟩, ike ⟨***mi*** ne yöte mařëřë⟩,
2SG with ART house 2SG with ART garden many
ike ⟨***mi*** ne ga⟩, ike ⟨***mi*** ne sōgë pusune⟩ ...
2SG with ART kava 2SG with ART pig numerous
'You have a house, you have many gardens, you have some kava, you have numerous pigs ...'

Hiw is the only language in its area that uses a comitative preposition 'with' in plain-possessive predicates. Next-door Lo-Toga has grammaticalised the same preposition *mi* into an inverse-possessive linker: see (64)–(65) in §6. Thus, to use the labels proposed in Chapter 1, Hiw builds upon an "S-possessor" pattern {*you (are) with a house*}, whereas Lo-Toga exploits the opposite "S-possessee" logic {*a house (is) with you*}.[23]

Bivalent verbs equivalent to English 'have' (called "transpossessive constructions" in Chapter 1) are extremely rare in Oceanic. Nafsan – a language already noticed for its verbal copula *pi* – has developed *pitlak* 'have', etymologically from *pi atlak* 'be owner' (Thieberger 2006: 272). This verb serves both for plain-possessives (93) and for existentials (94):

(93) *Nafsan* (Thieberger 2006: 262)
Ag ku=*pitlak* ntaewen.
2SG 2SG:REAL=have knowledge
'You have knowledge.'

23 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 verbal strategy, with posture verbs such as (85) *wene* 'lie' or *vio* 'stand' (see François 2021, under *wene teve* 'lie with' → 'belong to').

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

Another case of transpossessive structure is when a language has borrowed a verb 'have' from one of the lingua francas spoken in its 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).

8.4 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 its ascriptive predicates [see (54)]. Now, if the subject is anchored in space (e.g. *te-i uta* 'that [which is] inland'), the ascriptive interpretation gives way to an existential reading:

(95) *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2023: 127)
⟨E *pape*⟩ te-i uta.
INC freshwater ART-OBL inland
[Lit. '*That which is inland* (is) freshwater'] [EXISTENTIAL]
'There is freshwater further inland.'

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

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

The only clue that points to an existential reading is when the subject explicitly refers to a location or a possessor. Otherwise, {*e* +N} remains ambiguous:

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

Although Tahitian uses the same constructions for ascriptives and existentials in the affirmative, it contrasts them formally in the negative. Ascriptive clauses take a negative operator *e'ere* (comparable to Lo-Toga *deda* in §4.2.1):

(98) a. *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2023: 129)
⟨*E'ere*⟩ i te 'ori-ra'a.
NEG:ASCR OBL ART dance-NMLZ
'That is not a dance.' [NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIVE]

Existentials require a different negator *'aita* (Lazard and Peltzer 1991: 22):

(98) b. *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 and existentials in the affirmative, but coexpresses them in the negative, using the same clause-final negation *tae* for both:

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

While (99a) and (99b) are both verbless predicates, they differ in syntactic constituency – as suggested by the brackets around the predicate. In (99a), *tepakola* heads a noun predicate (SNP), which bears the negation *tae*; in (99b), the noun is the subject, and the (non-verbal) negator is the predicate.

Most Oceanic languages, however, contrast negative ascriptives and existentials. Thus, Mwotlap distinguishes (27) {*et*=X *te*} ('it is not X') vs. (89) {*tateh* X} ('there is no X').

9 Ostensive predicates

Ostensive constructions, as defined in Chapter 1, draw the addressee's attention towards the presence of a referent. One ostensive marker of Mwotlap is *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 function. *Ete* is always accompanied by deictic material – such as the third-degree demonstrative *gēn* [fn. 10, p. 1035], which is inherently ostensive [see (31)]:

(100) *Mwotlap* (François and Howard 2000: 4)
⟨**Ete** n-ēm̄ mino⟩ a *hag* ***gēn***, a isqet n-ēm̄yoñ *en*.
OST ART-house my FOC east DX3 FOC near ART-church DEIC
'*Here* (is) my house *up over there*, next to the church.'

Mwotlap has another ostensive morpheme *vatag*, used to locate a referent in motion; I label it "Kinetic ostensive" (OST:KIN). Just like with *ete* in (100), *vatag* is always followed by a demonstrative (e.g. *anen*), and usually by a space directional (e.g. *yow*):[24]

(101) *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 OST:KIN seawards LOC-ocean DX2
'They've abducted [*your wife*], and they're on their way out to the ocean (over there).'

Despite its predicative position, the ostensive *vatag* does not qualify as a verb, which makes (101) a non-verbal predicate. The same word has grammaticalised into a TAMP marker, the "kinetic presentative" (François 2003: 139–162), which combines with verbs:

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

In both ostensive strategies of Mwotlap, the ostensive marker is separate from the deictic elements; but some Oceanic languages have markers that incorporate the deictic information (similar to Fr. *voici*/*voilà*). For example, Hiw has two ostensive markers, *ëte* vs. *ëne*, respectively speaker-centered (DX1) and addressee-centered (DX2):

24 Mwotlap has a set of six space directionals, of which two are deictic (*me* 'hither', *van* 'thither') and four refer to geocentric coordinates (François 2005b: 140): *hag* 'up; southeast', *hōw* 'down; northwest', *hay* 'in; inland', *yow* 'out; seawards'.

(103) *Hiw* <https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0003256#S186>
Pa ***ënе*** 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, three ostensive particles *eie* (OST:DX1) – *enā* (OST:DX2) – *erā* (OST:DX3), and on the other hand, the demonstrative triplet *teie* (DEM:DX1) – *tenā* (DEM:DX2) – *terā* (DEM:DX3):

(104) a. *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2023: 155)
Erā te paoti.
OST:DX3 ART boss
'*There*'s the boss.' [OSTENSIVE PREDICATE]

b. *Tahitian* (Vernaudon 2023: 155)
Terā te paoti.
DEM:DX3 ART boss
'The boss, that's *him*.' [EQUATIVE PREDICATE]

Because ostensive clauses, by definition, refer to the here-and-now of the speech situation, they are not amenable to TAM inflection.

10 Conclusion

This overview described the many types of non-verbal predicates across Oceanic languages. 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 internal consistency, this study focused on the system of one language, Mwotlap, taken here as representative of Oceanic as a whole; yet other languages were examined when they showed different patterns.

One crucial property of Oceanic languages, firmly represented in Mwotlap, is that they tend to be *omnipredicative*: all major word classes can head a predicate, with no need to be derived into a verb or resort to a copula. As Table 3 shows, virtually all word classes in Mwotlap are [+predicative]: they can head at least a standard predicate, unmarked from the point of view of tense, aspect or modality. In addition, various constructions are even [+tamophoric], allowing the predicate to inflect for TAM. While some classes are not tamophoric in Mwotlap, they are in at least some Oceanic languages.

Table 3: Summary: Non-verbal predicates in Oceanic, organised by word class.

	PREDICATIVE (with no copula)	TAMOPHORIC (can inflect for TAM)		
	at least in Mwotlap	in Mwotlap	in some Oceanic lgs	
Postverb	N/A	N/A	N/A	§2
Verb	✓	✓	✓	§2
Adjective	✓	✓	✓	§3
Noun	✓	✓	✓	§4
Numeral	✓	✓	✓	§5
Possessive	✓	—	?	§6
Adverb, locative	✓	—	✓	§7
Existential	✓	—	✓	§8
Ostensive operator	✓	N/A	N/A	§9

Some Oceanic languages have developed copulas, verbal or not. Yet these are rare, and when they exist, are often restricted to specific contexts – e.g. to negative clauses, or TAM-inflected predicates. Through its propensity to treat almost any word as predicative, and its thorough predilection for verbless strategies, Mwotlap constitutes a chemically pure example of the tendencies that characterise the Oceanic family as a whole.

For the typologist, these empirical observations remind us that grammatical properties such as [predicative] and [tamophoric] – including the ability to encode dynamic events – should not be understood as intrinsically linked to the verb category. While these grammatical traits are prototypically associated with verbs across the world (Givón 1984), nothing prevents them, in fact, from being compatible with just any word class.

Abbreviations

1EXCL	first person exclusive
1INCL	first person inclusive
ABS	absolutive
ADJ	adjective
ANA	anaphoric
ANP	anchored noun predicate
AO	aorist
APPR	apprehensive mood
ART	article
ASCR	ascriptive predicate
ATTR	attribute prefix
CARRY	possessive classifier, items carried

CLSF	classifying particle
COMP	complementiser
COP	copula
DEIC	deictic
DIREC	directional
DUMMY	dummy noun
DX1	demonstrative, speaker-centered (≈ proximal)
DX2	demonstrative, addressee-centered (≈ distal)
DX3	demonstrative, ostensive
EQUAT	equative predicate
EXIST	existential predicator
FOC	focus particle
FOOD	possessive classifier, items eaten
HUM	number marker for humans
IAM	iamitive aspect (≈ 'already')
ID	identification (equative)
INAN	inanimate
INC	inclusive predicate
INTSF	Intensifier
IPFV	Imperfective
IRR	Irrealis
KIN	kinetic, encoding motion
LOC	locative
NEG:EX	negative existential
NMLZ	nominaliser
NONDUM	nondumitive, 'not yet'
NPST	non-past tense
OBJ	object marker
OBL	oblique marker
ORIG	originative prefix
OST	ostensive
PERS	personal article
PFT	perfect
PFV	perfective
POSS	possessive marker
POT	potential
PROSP	prospective aspect
PROX	proximal deictic
PRSV	presentative
QTF	quantifier
REAL	realis mood
REC.PST	recent past
REL	relativiser
SIM	similative
SNP	standard noun predicate
STA	stative aspect
SUB	subordinator
TAM	tense, aspect, mood

TAMP	tense, aspect, mood, polarity
TINP	TAM-inflected noun predicate
TONIC	tonic pronoun
TOP	topic marker
VB	verb
VC	verb complex

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