

Person syncretism and impersonal reference in Vanikoro languages

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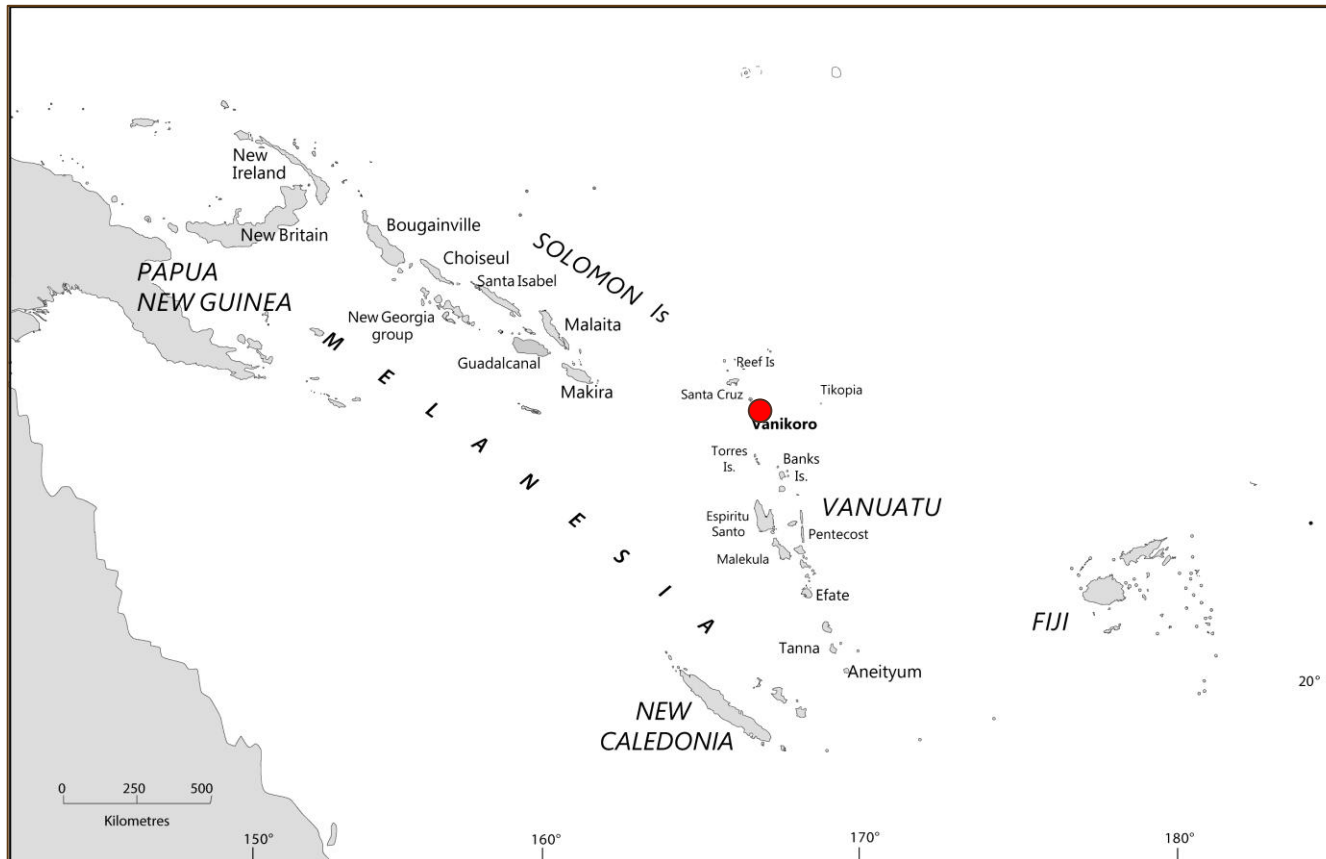
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Person syncretism and impersonal reference

- Person syncretism (Baerman & Brown 2005, WALS)
 - regular **homophony** in the inflectional **marking of arguments** on the verb
 - German *(wir/sie) sind, (wir/sie) machen* {1pl = 3pl}
 - Aymara *munchiyäta* 'I/you will love' {1sg = 2sg in future}
 - about **30%** of WALS sample show some syncretism, involving different persons
 - Languages of **Vanikoro**
 - 2 systematic syncretism patterns for non-Sg subjects {1exc = 2}
{1inc = 3}
- Impersonal reference
 - formal strategy to **avoid referring** to a specific participant
 - cf. French *On m'a volé ma voiture* '[Someone] stole my car. / My car was stolen.'
 - Languages of **Vanikoro**
 - include a **generic/impersonal pronoun** in their pronominal paradigm.
 - That **generic** person category participates in patterns of **person syncretism**.

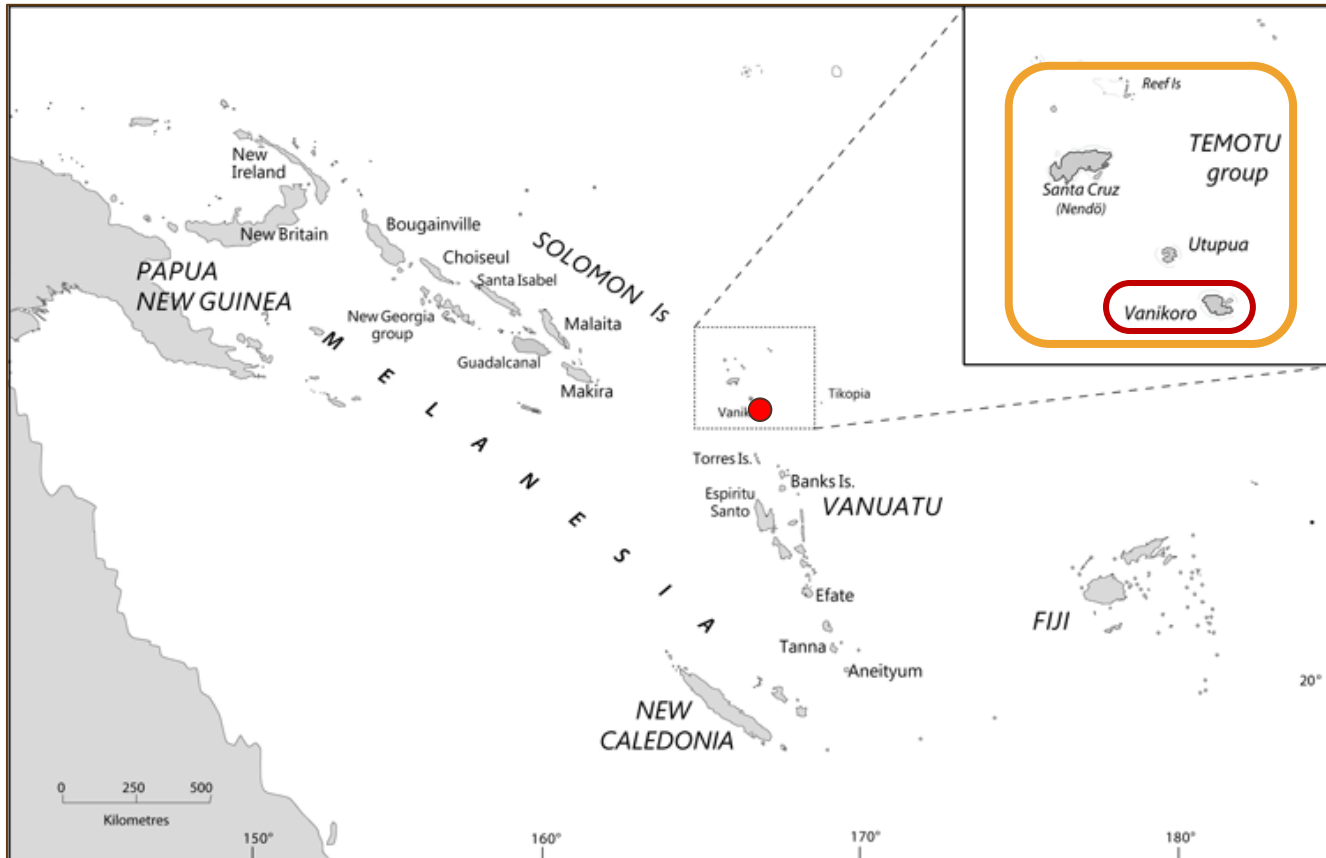
The languages of Vanikoro

Solomon Islands, Island Melanesia



The languages of Vanikoro

Solomon Islands, Island Melanesia



Vanikoro: 3 languages

- Oceanic
- Temotu subgroup (Ross & Naess 2007)

The languages of Vanikoro

Vanikoro: 3 languages

- **Teanu**, 800 sp.
- **Lovono**, 4 sp.
- **Tanema**, 1 sp.
- diversified forms, parallel structures (François 2009)
- structural similarity of their pronominal systems



Personal pronouns

TNM	nige	gamile	ŋela?	(gamuto)	mamo	ti-	runi	gamile	eia.
LVN	neŋe	gamila	eŋe?	(gamitu)	mwamelu	nup-	eti	gamila	taie.
TEA	eŋa	kela	ŋele?	(kupa)	mamote	pi-	romo	kela	tae.
	name	2DU	who	(1EX:PL)	still	1ex/2:PL:REAL-	see	2DU	NEG

Free pronouns:

- inalienable possessor
- topic
- object
- predicate...

‘What are your_{DU} names? (as for us_{PL}) we_{PL} haven't met you_{DU} yet.’

Subject prefixes:

- the only affixes in the whole language
- required with all **verbs** (but not *adjectives*, nor other predicates)
- encode **subject** [S,A] (person + number) + **mood** (Realis vs Irrealis)
- show patterns of **syncretism** in non-Sg: 1exc = 2; 1inc = 3

Personal pronouns: free forms

		Tanema	Lovono	Teanu
	1	nana	ɲane	ene
SG	2	go	ago	eo
	3	nini	ɲani	ini
	1EX	gabe	gema	keba
DU	2	gamile	gamila	kela
	INCL	gie	gita	kia
	3	delalu	dea	da
	1EX	gamuto	gamitu	kupa
	2	gamito	gaipa	kaipa
PL	INCL	geto	gitu	kiapa
	3	dato	detu	dapa
	GNRC	deli	nili	idi

Free pronouns

- classic structure in An/Oc
- 3 numbers: **Sg, Du, Pl**
- clusivity distinction: “1 exclusive” vs “**Inclusive**” (cf. Daniel 2005)
- Each language has 12 distinct forms, with **no syncretism**
- ... including a **Generic** human pronoun, rare in Oceanic lgs

An impersonal pronoun

- Special pronoun (*idi*) encodes generic, unspecified human argument
 - e.g. Generic human **object**

(1) Ini i-nate dapa.
3sg SBJ:3sg-insult 3pl
'He was insulting them.'

(1') Ini i-nate idi.
3sg SBJ:3sg-insult GNRC
'He was swearing (at people).'

Object demotion:

Bivalent verb V[A,O] becomes semantically unergative / intransitive.

(2) mwaliko pe i-waivo dapa
man REL 3sg-teach 3pl
[man who teaches *them*] = '*their* teacher'

3pl = specific referent '*they*'
→ anaphoric use

(2') mwaliko pe i-waivo idi
man REL 3sg-teach GNRC
[man who teaches (people)] = 'a/the teacher'

Generic = non-referential
→ no anaphor

An impersonal pronoun

- Special pronoun (*idi*) encodes generic, unspecified human argument
 - e.g. Generic human **object**

(3) U-labu **dapa** motoro!
3sg-hold **3pl** heavy
'Respect them!'

(3') U-labu **idi** motoro!
3sg-hold **GNRC:HUM** heavy
'Respect people! ~ Be respectful!'

(4) muko pe i-ke **idi**
fly REL 3sg-bite **GNRC:HUM**
['fly that bites (people)'] = 'mosquito'

(5) Dapa pe li-e **idi.**
3pl REL (3pl:R)-eat **GNRC:HUM**
[they eat (people)] 'They are cannibals.'

An impersonal pronoun

- Special pronoun (*idi*) encodes generic, unspecified human argument
 - e.g. Generic human **possessor**

(6) nuduko peini mata *idi* tamwaleko
 glass of eye GNRC:HUM bad
 [glasses for (one's) bad eyes] = 'prescription glasses'

(7) Noma, li-lanasu *idi* ne ngatene engaenga: ebele nga
 before (3pl)-bewitch GNRC OBL thing various for.example
 namolo *iaidi,* viabasa *idi,* kula none *aidi ...*
 clothing GEN.POSS:GNRC hair GNRC bit food FOOD.POSS:GNRC

'In the olden days, they would bewitch (*people*) using various items: using (*people's*) clothes, (*people's*) hair, (*people's*) food remains...'

- Body parts: **Free pronoun**
- other possession: **Possessive classifiers** inflected for GNRC
 = morphological evidence that GNRC belongs to person paradigm.

An impersonal pronoun

- Special pronoun (*idi*) encodes generic, unspecified human argument
 - e.g. Generic human **subject**

(8) **Idi** abia ne kulumoe **li-langatene** ne sekele.
 GNRC:HUM all LOC village Incl/3pl:R-work LOC garden
agreement ‘Everybody in the village is working in their gardens.’

- Unspecified/ defocused agent => functionally equivalent to **Passive**

(9) Program kula, **idi** li-la moli.
 program some GNRC:HUM Incl/3pl:R-give freely
 ‘Some software is just given for free.’

(10) Enga vilo pon, **li-mui** pe **li-kamai**.
 name plant that Incl/3pl:R-hot.know because Incl/3pl:R-make.come
 ‘The name of that plant is unknown [liter. (people) don't know it]
 because it is a foreign plant.’ [liter. (people) brought it here]

If only pronoun is subject prefix *li-*, there is ambiguity :
 [Generic *idi*] ~ [3pl:Spec *dapa*] ~ [Inclusive *kiapa*]

**Person syncretism
 in subject prefixes**

Personal pronouns: free forms

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	1	nana	ɲane	ene
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	3	nini	ɲani	ini
	1EX	gabe	gema	keba
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Free pronouns

- classic structure in An/Oc
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- clusivity distinction: “1 exclusive” vs “**Inclusive**” (cf. Daniel 2005)
- Each language has 12 distinct forms, with **no syncretism**

Personal pronouns: subject prefixes

		<i>Realis</i>			<i>Irrealis</i>		
		Tanema	Lovono	Teanu	Tanema	Lovono	Teanu
SG	1	ni-	ni-	ni-	na-	ka-	ne-
	2	gi-	nu-	a-	go-	ku-	u-
	3	i-	i-	i-	i-	ki-	i-
DU	1EX	ba-	nuba-	ba-	ba-	ba-	ba-
	2	ba-	nuba-	ba-	ba-	ba-	ba-
	INCL	la-	la-	la-	ja-	sa-	la-
	3	la-	la-	la-	ja-	sa-	la-
PL	1EX	ti-	nupe-	pi-	tu-	pe-	pe-
	2	ti-	nupe-	pi-	tu-	pe-	pe-
	INCL	li- / giti-	lepe-	li-	li-	kape-	le-
	3	li-	lepe-	li-	li-	se(pe)-	li-
	GNRC	li-	lepe-	li-	li-	se(pe)-	li-

Personal pronouns: subject prefixes

		<i>Realis</i>			<i>Irrealis</i>		
		Tanema	Lovono	Teanu	Tanema	Lovono	Teanu
SG	1	ni-	ni-	ni-	na-	ka-	ne-
	2	gi-	nu-	a-	go-	ku-	u-
	3	i-	i-	i-	i-	ki-	i-
DU	1EX	ba-	nuba-	ba-	ba-	ba-	ba-
	2	"	"	"	"	"	"
	INCL	la-	la-	la-	ja-	sa-	la-
	3	"	"	"	"	"	"
PL	1EX	ti-	nupe-	pi-	tu-	pe-	pe-
	2	"	"	"	"	"	"
	INCL	li- / giti-	lepe-	li-	li-	kape-	le-
	3	li-	"	"	"	se(pe)-	"
	GNRC	"	"	"	"	"	"

Personal pronouns: subject prefixes

- Rare patterns of syncretism
 - 1exc = **[+Speaker] [-Addressee] [+External]**
2 = **[-Speaker] [+Addressee] [+External]**
 - very rare (Cysouw 2005: 86), but found in Western Oceanic (Yabem, Sobei, Mekeo...) + Micronesian (Ulithian, Chuukese)
 - Incl = **[+Speaker] [+Addressee] [±External]**
3 = **[-Speaker] [-Addressee] [+External]**
 - very rare, but found in South Vanuatu + Nalik (W.Oc) + Muna (WMP) + Kiranti (Tibeto-Burman) + Tupinamba (Tupi)

Personal pronouns: subject prefixes

- Rare patterns of syncretism

- 1exc = [+Speaker] [−Addressee] [+External]
2 = [−Speaker] [+Addressee] [+External]

[= a group of people in which **you & I behave differently**
= **contrast** between speech act participants
= **exclusive** (*lato sensu*) = “**dislocutive**”

- Incl = [+Speaker] [+Addressee] [±External]
3 = [−Speaker] [−Addressee] [+External]
Generic = [±Speaker] [± Addressee] [±External]

[= a group in which **you & I behave identically**
(both present or both absent)
= no contrast between speaker & hearer
= **inclusive** (*lato sensu*) = “**collocutive**”

Handling ambiguity

- A common ambiguity

(11) Kape **LA-** vongo ne lema.
FUT COLLOC:DU- eat LOC inside

'The two of us_{INCL} ~ the two of them will eat inside.'

(12) Kape **BA-** vongo ne lema.
FUT DISLOC:DU- eat LOC inside

'The two of us_{EXCL} ~ the two of you will eat inside.'

- The ambiguity is often solved by the pragmatic context – but also by various formal clues.

Handling ambiguity

- Disambiguating contexts

- coreferential free pronoun in **topic** position

(13) **Keba** **BA-** le Tetevo na.
1EX:DU *DISLOC:DU-* go Utupua now
'The two of us_{EXCL} are going to Utupua.'

- coreferential free pronoun in **object** position (Middle/Reflexive)

(14) **LI-** wamu **kiapa** ne moe.
COLLOC:PL- hide **Incl:Pl** LOC house
'We hide [ourselves] in the house.'

(14') **LI-** wamu **dapa** ne moe.
COLLOC:PL- hide **3pl** LOC house
'They hide [themselves] in the house.'

(14'') **LI-** wamu **idi** ne moe.
COLLOC:PL- hide **GNRC** LOC house
'People hide [themselves] in the house.'

Handling ambiguity

- Disambiguating contexts
 - Typical correlation between person reference and **modality**:
 - **Irrealis + Imperative** prosody => ORDER => targets Addressee

(15) **P**-ae jebute me **PE**-tau me **P**-e!
DISLO:PL:IRR-dig taro and *DISLO:PL:IRR*-bake and *DISLO:PL:IRR*-eat
'Harvest taros (*y' all*), cook them and eat them!'

- **Question** = centred on Addressee => *dislocutive* = YOU
Declarative = centred on Speaker => *dislocutive* = WE

(16) **BA**- le vele? – **BA**- le ne ole.
DISLO:DU- go where *DISLO:DU*- go LOC beach
'Where are **you** going? – **We**'re going to the beach.'

cf. "**Conjunct/Disjunct**" systems (e.g. Tibetan; Quechua; Akhvakh...)
where {1:Declarative} = {2:Interrogative}...

The vagueness of the plural collocative

- The plural collocative (*li-*): another form of ambiguity

(17) basavono pe **LI**-anu kava
moment REL *COLLO:PL*-drink kava

‘when *we~they~people* drink kava’ = ‘in kava-drinking moments’

(18) **LI**-romo nga voko, ia pon voko tae.
COLLO:PL-see like stone but that stone NEG

‘It looks like a stone, but it's not a stone.’

(19) Mamote **LI**-te ene.
still *COLLO:PL*-stay there

‘It's still inhabited.’

(21) Vao, we pe **LI**-womanga?
wild or REL *COLLO:PL*-feed

‘Is it wild, or *tame*?’ [‘is it wild or which *we~they~people* feed’]

(22) Mamuli **LI**-ve **ini** Tewove.
(name) *COLLO:PL*-beget 3sg (place)

‘Mamuli was born in Tewove.’ [Mamuli, (*they*) bore her in Tewove.]

Cline between contexts that are compatible with **Incl/3pl interpretations**, and contexts that force a **passive-like/ impersonal/ defocused-agent** reading

Conclusion

- Significant correlation between pronoun categories
 - **Dislocutive** entails contrast between speech act participants
 - => category “**person**” is most salient
 - => incompatible with *Impersonal* reading
 - **Collocutive** entails no contrast between *you* and *me*
 - => contrasts of person are backgrounded (Incl, 3pl)
 - => likelihood of *Impersonal* / *Generic* readings, and **agent Defocusing / Demoting**
 - cf. Eng. “arbitrary **they**”: *They’ve stolen my bike again.*
 - cf. Fr. **on**: formally **3sg**; funct^{lly} **Impersonal** => replaces **1pl** *nous* in colloquial Fr.
 - *On est tous les mêmes.* ‘We are all the same.’
 - Generic/impersonal = **bridging context** between Inclusive and 3pl.
 - These typological tendencies are grammaticalised in Vanikoro languages into a robust and elegant system.

Awis!

