

Coverbs in the languages of Vanuatu and beyond

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Coverbs in the Oceanic context

Nuclear serial verb constructions (NSVCs)

Prototypical NSVCs:

- two (or more) contiguous stems in the nucleus
- the whole construction has one set of arguments
- the two verbs together express a single event
- **each can function as an independent verb on its own**

(Crowley 2002; Brill & Ozanne-Rivierre 2004; Aikhenvald & Dixon 2006, Haspelmath 2016)

(Foley and Van Valin (1984) on nucleus, core and periphery)

V1

V2

Mrë-sba-palong *husür-i* *kiaha.*

2DU-NEG-hear follow-OBJ today

Ahamb (NCVanuatu)

‘You two did not obey [the advice] today.’ [40-119]

Coverbs in Oceanic

- A small class of forms, which **only appear in the V2 position** of constructions that are similar to nuclear SVCs.
- **Non-canonical verbs** - cannot take subject indexes or other prefixed modifiers as independent verbs
- **Cannot appear outside of the nucleus**
- Semantically and structurally overlap with verbs, prepositions, adverbs, quantifiers...
- East Asian languages: coverbs form asymmetrical SVCs; similar to prepositions (e.g. Clark 1975; Thepkanjana 1986; Lord 1993; Matthews 2006)
- Australian languages: partial overlap with verbs, adverbs and nominals; open class in some languages (e.g. Schultze-Berndt 2000: 69; Baker & Harvey 2010; Krauße 2020)

Examples of coverbal constructions from Ahamb (NCVanuatu)

Slot 1
(S1)

Slot 2
(S2)

Ka-r-jav *pur-e* *lön* *mataw.*

2SG-SBQT-cut break-OBJ LOCP axe

‘You split it (a coconut) with an axe.’ [4-47]

Ta-ro-yesyes *kuv* *nwoy.*

3PL-IPFV-scoop.out remove water

‘They are scooping the water out.’ [51-67]

Ange *mjög* *nga-pen* *bbën-i* *nh-en.*

3SG then 3SG-shoot kill-OBJ POSS.ALIM-3SG

‘He then shoots dead (the fish) for himself [to eat].’ [112-40]

The set of coverbs in Ahamb

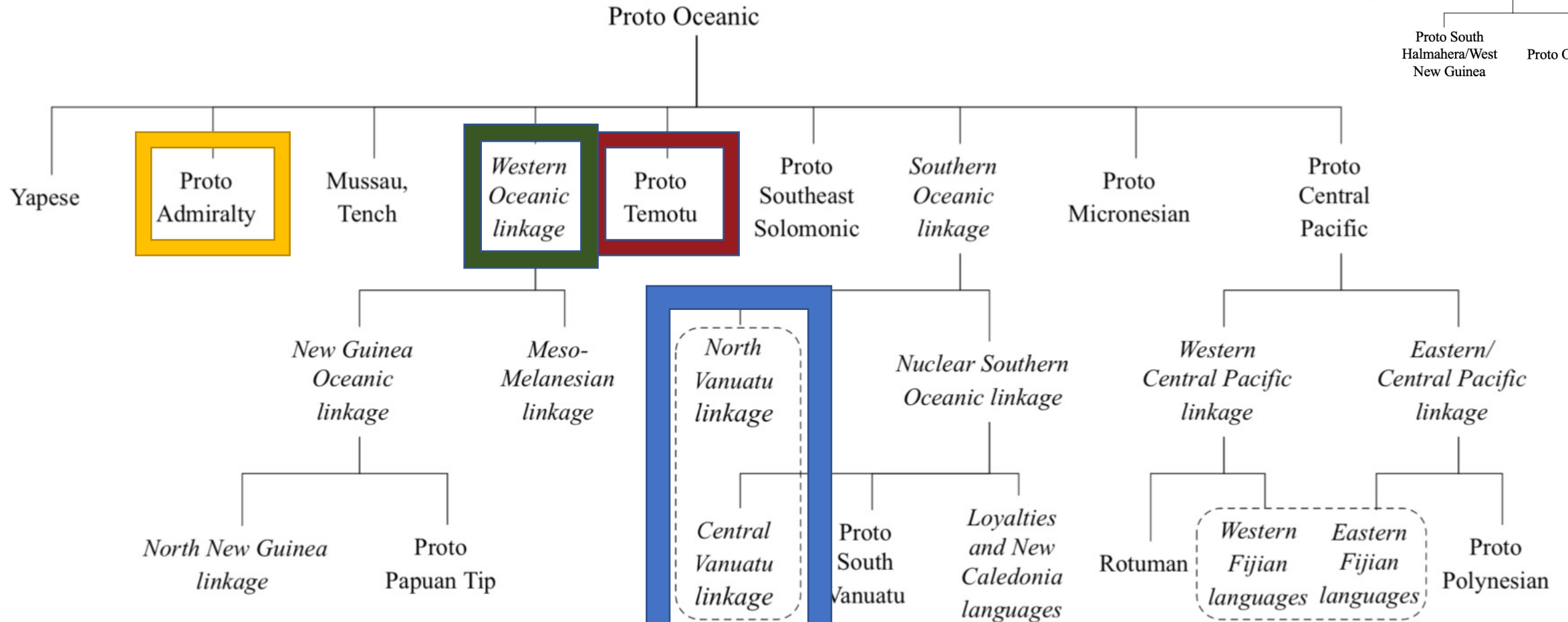
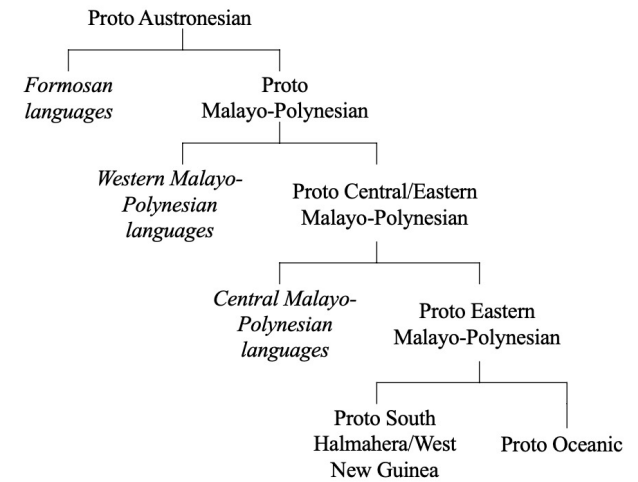
- *(por)por* 'break, compromise the unity of'
- *(kuj)kuj* 'break off'
- *krov* 'cross, break through'
- *(bbën)bbën* 'kill, die, eliminate'
- *(kuv)kuv* 'remove'
- *koj* 'figure out, inspect' (cognitive functions)
- *gwan* 'tighten'
- *jur* '(bring) down'

In today's talk

- Coverbs in other languages of Vanuatu
- Evidence of coverbs in other Oceanic languages
- The morphosyntactic and semantic properties of coverbs

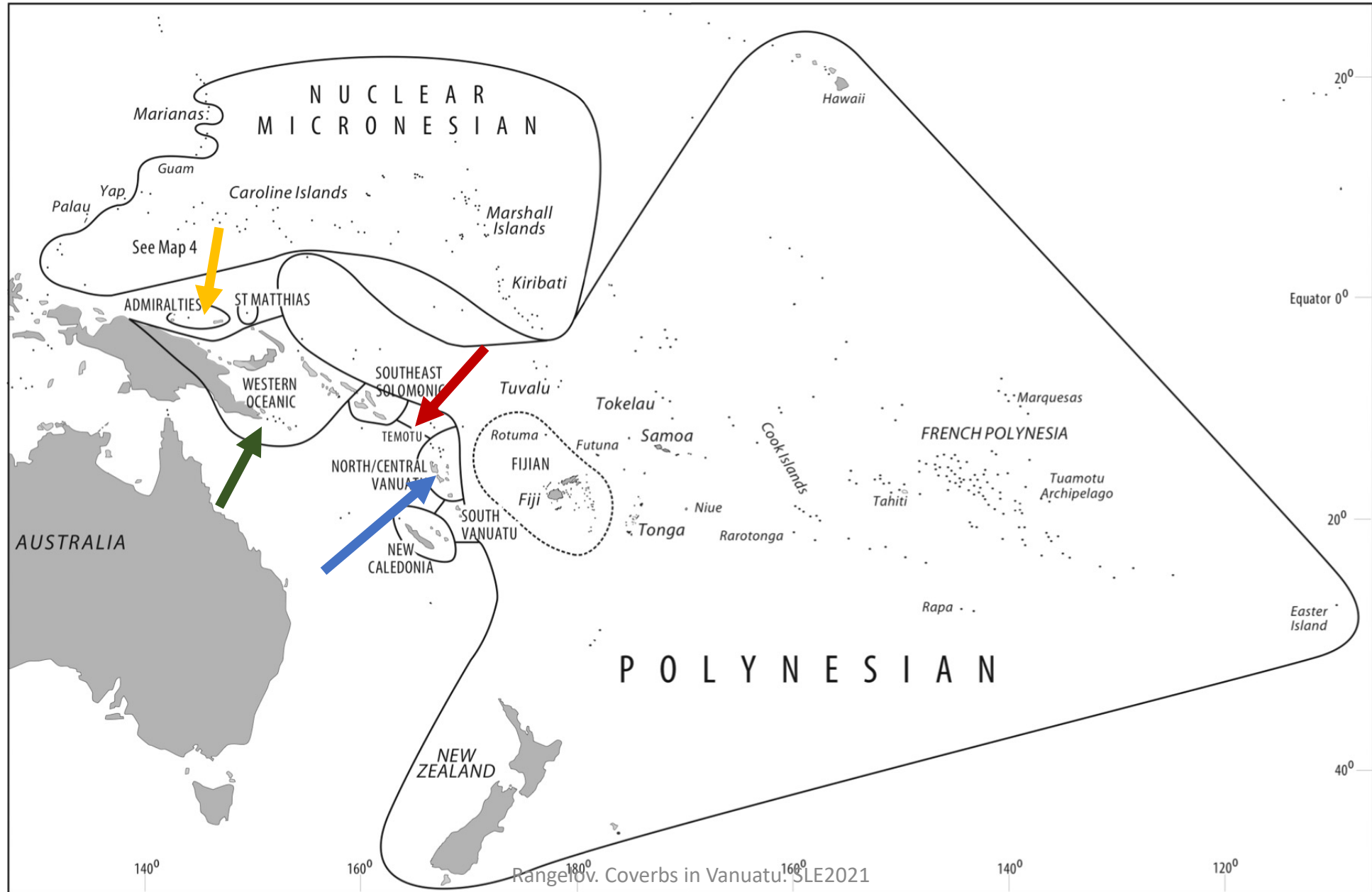
Terminology

- “adjuncts”
- “less prototypical members of SVCs”
- “less ‘verby’-looking constituents”
- “verb-like”
- “verbal compounds”
- “serialised verbs”
- “restricted serial verbs”
- “restricted class of result adverbs”
- “adverbs”
- “phrasal adverbs”
- “**postverbs**”

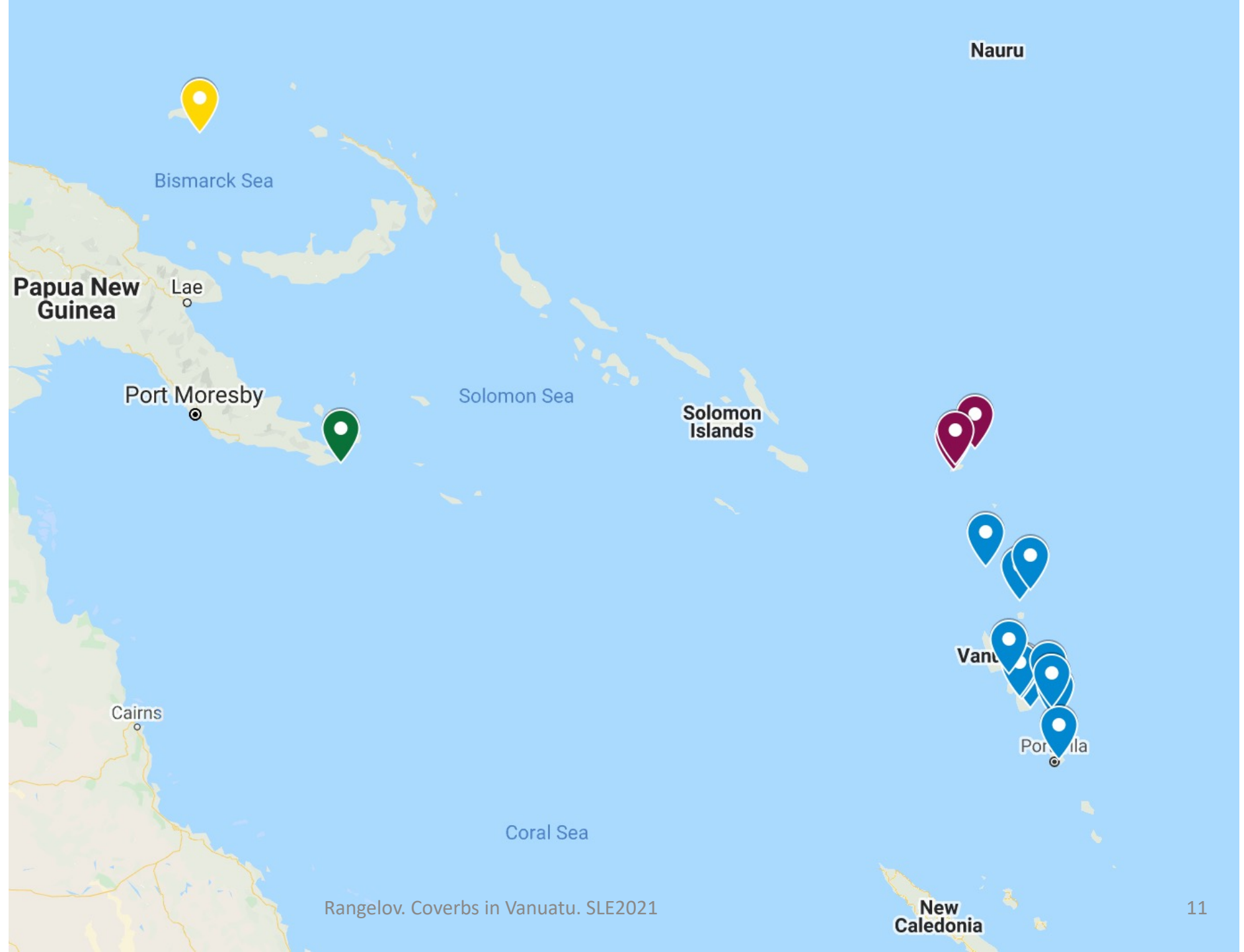


Oceanic languages

Map from (Ross, Pawley & Osmond 2016)



Languages in this talk



Rangelov. Coverbs in Vanuatu. SLE2021

Languages with coverbs in Vanuatu

Mwotlap +17 (François 2005, 2011, 2017, 2020 p.c.)

- 100+ “pure adjuncts”
- Also in Hiw (60+ forms)
- “postverbs” in 16 other languages of the Banks and Torres for ‘find’ and ‘just, only’

<i>day</i>	‘wait’
<i>deñhel</i>	‘askew, lopsided’
<i>ētog</i>	‘eat the first fruits of a harvest’
<i>galsi</i>	‘well, correctly, exactly,
<i>ganwon</i>	‘suddenly, unexpectedly, without warning’
<i>gaymōm</i>	‘mumble, (speak) indistinctly, unintelligibly’
<i>heleg</i>	‘just, only, exclusively’
<i>higap</i>	‘miss’
<i>kal</i>	‘upwards’
<i>lat</i>	‘split’

Vurës (Krauße, Palmer & Malau (to appear))

- “A restricted class of result adverbs”

<i>gōr</i>	‘blocked, sealed’
<i>lēt</i>	‘crosswise apart’
<i>liñereg</i>	‘in(side)’
<i>lō</i>	‘out’
<i>siër</i>	‘spotted, found’
<i>sösögöt</i>	‘spotted, found’
<i>sur</i>	‘down onto surface’
<i>tuwur</i>	‘behind’
<i>viteg</i>	‘(completely) away’

Lewo (Early 1994)

- 88 “serialised verbs” - only appear in S2
- Mainly resultative and manner verbs
- Dialectal variation, e.g. *kokan* ‘decieve, lie’ can function as a main verb in the Moriu dialect, but not in Nikaura dialect
- Indication of grammaticalisation (“drift away from the SVC”): *ḗele* ‘unable’ and *li(a)* ‘try’ have been attested outside of the nucleus (after the object)

<i>lari</i>	‘remove’
<i>kalawa</i>	‘go over’
<i>ḿari</i>	‘kill’
<i>piora</i>	‘around’
<i>make</i>	‘totally effected’
<i>mate</i>	‘wait’
<i>marani</i>	‘return’
<i>pogo</i>	‘waken’
<i>yau</i>	‘above’
<i>pali</i>	‘miss’
<i>wali</i>	‘find’
<i>terereni</i>	‘miss’
<i>ra</i>	‘together’

Avava (Crowley 2006)

- “Less ‘verby’-looking constituents appear in [S2]’
- S2s (“serialised forms”) – appears as “the second element in SVCs” and “only in such constructions”

<i>lovlop</i>	‘soften’
<i>beh</i>	‘clean (tr.)’
<i>bbun</i>	‘kill (tr.)’ (<i>mat bbun</i> ‘dead’ – intr.)
<i>bbuleh</i>	‘turn over (tr.)’
<i>boh</i>	‘break open (tr.)’
<i>bwiti</i>	‘accidentally (tr.)’
<i>yala</i>	‘over (tr.)’
<i>titipm</i>	‘try’
<i>bbusal</i>	‘go along the road’
<i>dilivih</i>	‘go around’
<i>lu</i>	‘out (tr.)’
<i>wah</i>	‘look for (intr.)’
<i>bivil</i>	‘everywhere, all over’
<i>lalak</i>	‘quietly, secretly (intr.)’
<i>tata</i>	‘tight, hard (tr.)’

Neverver (Barbour 2012)

- “Less prototypical members of the SVC category”; “verb-like items”
- Grammaticalisations from coverb to aspectual morpheme, prepositions, adverbs

<i>delvis</i>	‘go around’,
<i>bburvur</i>	‘totally’
<i>bbutakh~</i>	
<i>bbutkha</i>	‘really, very’
<i>brong</i>	‘ordinary’
<i>dring</i>	‘in a line’
<i>duvakh</i>	‘be first’
<i>khiskhis~</i>	
<i>kiskis</i>	‘certainly, to excess’
<i>lakhtakh</i>	‘quietly’
<i>tetes</i>	‘quickly’

Neve'ei (Musgrave 2007)

- “Restricted serial verbs”
- Semantic contribution of restricted serial verbs: manner, spatial orientation

<i>bin</i>	‘do to death’
<i>lowi</i>	‘out, away’
<i>totovung</i>	‘try’
<i>dilivih</i>	‘around’

North Ambrym (Franjeh 2012)

- “Verbal compounds”

<i>se</i>	‘good/secure’
<i>onon</i>	‘crazy/rubbish’
<i>kabnu</i>	‘dead’
<i>kote</i>	‘break’
<i>kete</i>	‘tight’
<i>baba</i>	‘split’
<i>goro</i>	‘block’
<i>kere</i>	‘miss’
<i>funu</i>	‘finish’
<i>keya</i>	‘try’
<i>fwelangte</i>	‘around/about’

Paamese (Crowley 2002: 85-97)

- 30 forms with “functional restriction of the second member of the SVC”

kirkiriti ‘do idly’

kokoloni ‘wait’

kole ‘block, cover’

tooni ‘miss’

viisi ‘try’

rahiti ‘go around’

koti ‘go across’

lei ‘go out’

kotehe ‘cut in two’

vinii ‘kill, do to excess’

vulavule ‘at full pace’

sesaa ‘to the brim’

kitau ‘be in a relaxed position such that one is not in danger of farting’

Tamambo (Jauncey 2011: 82, 265, 352ff, 364)

- “Phrasal adverbs” – Evidence of diachronic process from verbs to coverbs

Location or movement

<i>lalihi</i>	‘in turn’, ‘one after the other’
<i>lulusi</i>	‘from one place to another’
<i>maravitu</i>	‘close to’, ‘near’
<i>(dali)dalihahi</i>	‘all around’
<i>bwaki</i>	‘encircling’
<i>wotowotongi</i>	‘facing’

Manner

<i>tamahi</i>	‘with difficulty’
<i>wanju(hi)</i>	‘quietly’
<i>toho/tohi</i>	‘quickly’
<i>vonotahi</i>	‘carelessly’
<i>(vosa)vosai</i>	‘very well’, ‘perfectly’

Non-result

<i>lesi</i>	‘try’
<i>wati</i>	‘unable’
<i>vatarahi</i>	‘wait’
<i>vonohi</i>	‘for nothing’

Nafsan (South Efate) (Thieberger 2006, p.c.)

- “Verb compounds”
 (“verb combining
 similar to that called
 nuclear-layer in
 descriptions of other
 Oceanic languages”)

pun

‘kill’

sok

‘jump’

Outside of Vanuatu

Nalögo (Alfarano 2021: 273ff)

nalo1235, Temotu (Solomon Islands) (-10.80, 165.80)

- “Coverbal constructions”
- Common in Cut&Break events, manner, endpoint, completion, intensification

<i>neblü</i>	‘follow’
<i>delü</i>	‘away’
<i>kap(ü)</i>	‘stand, hide’
<i>lëblö</i>	‘together’
<i>taikü</i>	‘very, too’
<i>ani</i>	‘very’
<i>glâ</i>	‘break (in pieces)’

Äiwoo and Natügu (Næss & Boerger 2008)

ayiw1239, Temotu (Solomon Islands) (-10.28, 166.33)

natu1246, Temotu (Solomon Islands) (-10.68, 165.84)

- “Bound adverbs” in Äiwoo and Natügu

Äiwoo

<i>vesi</i>	‘still’
<i>lâoo</i>	‘always’
<i>mana</i>	‘very’
<i>ngege</i>	‘immediately’

(Data from 1970s shows *ngege* as independent verb meaning ‘push’)

Natügu

<i>dwëlö</i>	‘back’
<i>mou</i>	‘again’
<i>glâ</i>	‘shatter in pieces’
<i>päi</i>	‘break sth. soft with hands’
<i>väi</i>	‘broken, break sth long’
<i>blâ</i>	‘jump’
<i>ëngya’</i>	‘thither’

Saliba (Margetts 1999)

sali1295, Western Oceanic (Papuan Tip, PNG) (-10.61, 150.73)

- “Nucleus-plus-operator constructions”
- Adverbial, aspectual modification
- Evidence of grammaticalization to post-verbal particles

kalili ‘very’
kesegai ‘one/continuously’

Paluai (Schokkin 2014: 317ff)

balu1257 Admiralties (Manus, PNG) (-2.56, 147.28)

- “Restricted members of asymmetrical SVCs”.
- Prone to grammaticalisation – develop into adpositions, adverbs, case markers, TAM markers

<i>tou</i>	‘be fastened’
<i>lêp</i>	‘while taking s.th.’
<i>lot</i>	‘fall’
<i>liliu</i>	‘return’
<i>tarak</i>	‘ascend’

Indications of the verbal nature of coverbs

- semantic properties
- have verbal cognates in other languages
- can reduplicate
- can take some verbal morphology
- related independent verb forms, e.g.
 - Valency decreasing/anticausative forms with reflexes of POc *ma- (Evans 2003:267). Examples from Ahamb:
 - *mapor(por)* ‘be broken’
 - *makuv(kuv)* ‘be removed/out/away’
 - *ma(kë)krov* ‘be broken, be severed, be interrupted’
 - *majur* ‘descend, set (for sun), go out (for tide)’

Summary

- The second form (S2) in a complex nucleus, which
 - cannot function as an independent verb
 - cannot occur outside of the nucleus
- Found in a number of languages in Vanuatu, but also in other Oceanic languages
- Semantically resemble verbs, prepositions, adverbs, quantifiers
- Commonly express manner, result (breaking, killing...), spatial orientation, direction
- Separate closed word class
- Most likely derived from verbs
- Involved in grammaticalisation processes (cf. Durie 1988, Lord 1993, Crowley 2002, Thieberger 2007, Rangelov 2020)
coverb > preposition/adverb/TAM markers...

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