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Efatic: Toward A history

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Abstract

"Efatic" is a proposed term for a network of lects extending from the south coast of Efate to Tongoa, in central Vanuatu. Previous studies have treated this network as a single language, or have divided it into two or three separate languages. The present paper does not address this quantitative question, but builds on earlier work (Clark 1985a,b), using significantly improved sources of data on several lects, to clarify the internal and external relations of these dialects.

Phonological, morphological and lexical evidence is presented for the historical unity of Efatic, and its close relation to its geographical neighbour, Namakir. The history of the dispersion and diversification of the present lects from "Proto-Efatic" is traced via shared innovations.

A small number of early post-PEf changes indicate an early division into a southern and a northern branch, the former being ancestral to the present lects of Pango, Erakor, Eratap and Eton. Further changes within the two regions accompany dispersion of populations, with Northern and Southern speakers eventually coming into contact. Lects at the North-South interface show evidence of influence: Lelepa (N) shows extensive borrowing of southern forms, while Ebau (N) and (Eton) share some innovations indicating a secondary (Eastern) centre of innovation.

Finally some comments are made on the implications of this picture for the resettlement of northern islands after the Kuwae eruption of the 15th century AD.

Summary in Bislama

"Efatic" hem i nem we mi wanem yusum blong talem ol difren lanwis we oli yusum long Efate wetem ol smol aelan, go kasem Tongoa. Efatic i no inkludum ol Polynesian lanwis (Fakamae long Emae wetem Imere-Ifira long Efate). Namakir lanwis tu, mi no inkludum long Efatic, be hem i klosap, olsem famle blong Efatic. Long atikol ya, mi soem se i gat fulap smol samting long lanwis we oli blong Efatic nomo. Hemia i min se Efatic i wan grup o smol famle blong lanwis. Mo tu, mi lukluk long histri blong Efatic – olsem wanem ol difren lanwis insaed long Efatic oli seraot, oli go wanwan, kasem tedei. Mi faenem tufala bigfala grup insaed long Efatic: grup blong Saot (ol lanwis blong Pango, Erakor, Eratap mo Eton) mo grup blong Not (ol lanwis blong Lelepa, Nguna, Emau, Epau, Sasake mo Tongoa). Laswan, mi lukluk bakegen long histri blong taem we volkeno "Kuwae" i faerap.

Keywords

Efate, Namakir, Nafsan, Nguna, dialects, subgroups, Kuwae

1 Introduction

The dialects to be discussed here are spoken in central Vanuatu, from the south coast of Efate as far north as Tongoa in the Shepherd Group. They include some of the largest languages in Vanuatu.[1]

An earlier study (Clark, 1985a) was aimed at the question of where language boundaries might be drawn within the group. In revisiting these dialects here, I will not be concerned with this question, or with how many languages might result from drawing such boundaries.[2] I will use the single word "Efatic" to emphasize that they are a historic unit – a subgroup which has diversified beyond the language limit, but where inter-dialectal influences have continued to be important.

My re-visitation of Efatic is justified largely by greatly improved descriptive data available since the 1980s – notably the work of Thieberger, Billington and associates on Nafsan, Lacrampe's study of Lelepa, and unpublished notes on Tongoa and North Efate dialects by Miller and Rivierre. The field notes of Schütz and Facey on Nguna which were an important source for the earlier study have been subsumed and expanded in a published dictionary (Schmidt, 2023).

Table 1 shows the sources of data on the eight Efatic dialects that will be alluded to here, as well as their close neighbour Namakir.[3]

[1] Nakanamaga (9500 speakers) and South Efate (6000) are parts of Efatic, and rank among the ten largest languages; among the next ten are Namakura (3750) and Mele-Fila (3500), close neighbours and interactors with Efatic. (François et al., 2015, Table 2). See Séverin (2025, this issue) for a detailed picture of the present linguistic situation.

[2] Capell considered all of Efatic "essentially one language" (1962, p. 218). In a preliminary assessment, Tryon (1972, p. 64) assigned all the Efatic dialects in his survey to a single language, "Efatese", with Northern and Southern dialect areas. By the time of publication of his full survey (Tryon 1976, p. 92) this had been divided into the two languages "North Efate" (Woraviu, Sesake, Nguna, Pwele, Siviri) and "South Efate" (Lelepa, Pango, Eratap, Eton). Grimes (1996) was apparently the first to treat Lelepa as a separate third language. Finally, François et al. (2015, pp. 18–21) also assign separate language status to Eton, giving a total of four.

[3] For locations of the dialects, see the maps in Séverin (2025, this issue), especially Figs. 1 and 2.

Table 1

Dialect	Source	Location
Namakir	Tryon 1976 (Makura, Mataso, Bongabonga, Tongariki) Clark 1980 (Sangava) Sperlich 1991, n.d. (Makura) Rivierre n.d.a	Southeast side of Tongoa Island, Tongariki, Buninga, Makura, Mataso Islands, Sangava village (Emae Island)
Tongoa	Miller 1945-1961 Tryon 1976 (Woraviu) Rivierre n.d.b	Northwest side of Tongoa Island
Sasake	Patteson 1866 Tryon 1976 Clark 1980	Sasake village, Emae Island
Nguna	Schütz 1969a,b Tryon 1976 (Nguna, Pwele, Siviri) Schmidt 2023	Nguna Island, Pwele Island, villages on North Efate
Emau	Clark 1980 Rivierre n.d.b	Emao Island, Northeast Efate
Lelepa	Tryon 1976 Clark 1980 Lacrampe 2014	Lelepa Island and Mangaliliu village, West Efate
Ebau	Clark 1980	Epao village, East Efate
Eton	Tryon 1976 Clark 1980	Eton and Pang Pang , East Efate
Nafsan	Clark 1980 (Pango) Thieberger 2006 Thieberger et al. 2021 (Erakor)	Erakor, Pango and Eratap villages, South Efate

I will first situate Efatic within its larger context and review the evidence for its unity; then consider some divisions within the group; and finally I hope to comment on a couple of larger issues to which the Efatic picture might be considered to hold some relevance.

2 Efatic in Context

I will assume a North and Central Vanuatu (NCV) subgroup, and a Central Vanuatu (CV) subgroup within that. There is some evidence that the languages of Epi are most closely related to those of the Efate-Shepherds area. Evidence for these larger groupings is given in Clark (1985b) and Clark (2009); the latter also includes evidence for the Proto-NCV forms cited here.

2.1 Efate-Shepherds subgroup

Table 2 shows some lexical evidence that Efatic and Namakir together form an "Efate-Shepherds" subgroup.[4] "Lexical evidence" may include (i) replacement in the meaning slot by an etymologically unrelated word (e.g. BURAO in Table 2); (ii) irregular sound change in a particular lexical item (HEAD); (iii) morphological change such as reduplication (HAIR in Table 4), accretion of an originally distinct morpheme (Table 7), or analogical changes within a paradigm.

Table 2

	PNCV	**Proto Efate-Shepherds**	NMk	Nguna	Nafsan
BURAO (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*)	*vaRu	***bilelu**	bilel	pilelu	naplel
CANOE	*waqa	***rarua**	raru	rarua	raru
DAY	*rani	***ʔale-ʔati 'daytime'** ***ʔale-ʔati-a 'day (24 hrs)**	leati	aleati	aliat
FINGER	*bisu	***kini-**	kini-	nakini	nak(i)ni-
FOOD	*kani-ana *sinaka	***vinaga**	vinag	navinaga	nafnag
HEAD	*bwatu	***bwaʔu**	b^{w}aʔi-	nap^{w}au	np^{w}au
SISTER OF MALE	*vavine	***qore**	qore-	gore-	kore-
STEP ON	*vara-si	***vaʔa-si**	baʔah	vaasi	pa-fasi
TOOTH	*livo	***bati**	bati-	napati-	npati-

A sound change which appears to be definitive of Proto-Efate-Shepherds is velarization - the shift of the labial consonants **b, *m, *v* to the corresponding labiovelars[5] before **o* (Table 3).

Table 3

	PNCV	**PE-S**	NMk	Nguna	Nafsan
NIGHT	*bogi	***bwogi**	e-bwog	pwoogi	pwog
LOST	*sabo	***sabwo**	-	sapwo	saapw
CITRUS	*moli	***mwoli**	mwol	na-mwooli	mwool
POOL	*dumo	***dumwo**	-	duumwo	-
PADDLE	*vose	***wose**	woh	na-wose	nawes naos
PLANT (v)	*lavo	***lawo**	lowo-k	la-lawo	lao

Thus, Namakir is not only the closest non-Polynesian neighbour of Efatic, but also its closest phylogenetic relative.

[4] Conventions for spelling Efatic languages in this paper include *b, d, q* for prenasalized voiced stops (as in Fijian and in Clark, 2009); *g* for the velar nasal; *bw, pw, mw* for the labio-velar series. In most tables, bold type is used to call attention to the innovative forms.

[5] The articulation *vw*, recorded elsewhere in NCV, does not occur in Efate-Shepherds languages, but may have been an intermediate stage in the shift **v* > ***vw* > *w* (and further > *Ø* in Nafsan) in this environment.

2.2 Proto-Efatic

Table 4 illustrates lexical innovations of Proto-Efatic, shared by all Efatic dialects but not by Namakir:

Table 4

	PNCV	NMk	**PEf**	Nguna	Nafsan
BLACK	*maʔeto	maʔet	***gota**	gogota	got
FLYING FOX	*manikona	manikon	***manitua**	manitua	mantu
HAIR	*vulu	vili-	***na-lulu-**	nalulu-	nalu-
HAND, ARM	*lima	lima-	***na-aru-**	naaru	naru-
MEN'S HOUSE	*kamali	kamal	***(e)-varea**	varea	efare
MOON	*kabatia	kibati	***atelagi**	atelagi	atlag
PIG	*bukasi	bwokah	***waaqo**	waago	waak
ROAD	*sala	hal	***na-pua**	napua	napu
1sg Subject Pronoun	*nV	ni	***a**	a	a

A sound change affecting all of Efatic, is the loss of original glottal stop (PNCV *ʔ), which is retained by Namakir (see BLACK in Table 4, RAIN and EGG in Table 9). But since Namakir is apparently unique in Vanuatu in retaining this POC consonant, its loss has to be considered commonplace, hence not a strong indicator.

Another Efatic innovation is illustrated in Table 5:

Table 5

	PNCV	NMk	**PEf**	Nguna	Nafsan
BANANA	*vudi	-	***na-adi**	naadi	naanr
BOW	*vusu	vih	***na-asu**	naasu	naas
CLUB	(*ubwe)	umw	***na-apwe**	naapwe	naapw 'windpipe'
LEAF (OF)	*vulu-i	vili-n 'hair'	***na-ali-kau**	naalikau	-
FIBRE	*(v)unu	(in)	***na-anu**	naanu	-

The change is presumably **ná-vu >> **ná-u >> ná-a*, but it is difficult to establish exact conditions for the changes. Weakening of **vu > u* is a clear tendency in Efatic. (See HAIR in Table 4, where **vulu-vulu > **ulu-ulu > lulu*), but the smoothing **au > aa* does not occur with that same root on its own (Nguna *naulu*, SEf *naul* 'leaf'), or with originally u-initial nouns (Ng *naure* 'island', *nauti* 'penis').

A more unusual sound change, strengthening of **y* to *s*, is found at the Proto-Efatic level in just two items (Table 6).

Table 6

	PNCV	Namakir	**PEf**	Nguna	Nafsan
HOUSE	*yum^{w}a	im^{w}	***na-sumwa**	nasumwa	nasumw
STRONG	*kayua	-	***kasua**	kasua	(Eb gasu)

The shared environment here is **a__u*. The same change in the mirror-image environment **u__a* probably accounts for the otherwise unparalleled Efatic transitive suffix *-sa* on verbs ending in *-u* (Schütz 1969b:38), e.g. Nguna *vaku-sa*, Nafsan *mwok-us* 'pull out-Tr', where apparently **-u-ia* > **-uya* > *-usa*.

2.2.1 Morphological Accretions

Table 7 shows Efatic morphological accretion of initial *m-* (probably from a realis marker) to verbs with original **u-*.

Table 7

	PNCV	NMk	**PEf**	Nguna	Nafsan
HIGH TIDE	*Rua	u	***mua**	mua	mu
LAUGH	*uru	ur	***muru**	muru	mur
LOAD	*Ruza	-	***musa-gi**	musa-gi	msag-i
SHED SKIN	*ulu	-	***mulu**	mulu-si	mul-si

2.2.2 **na*-accretion in Efatic

Much more conspicuous is the accretion of the Oceanic noun-marker **na-* to many Efatic nouns. The history of **na* is discussed in a classic paper by Crowley (1985), who suggests an original noun-class marking function for Proto-Oceanic **na*, which has evolved in many different directions in different Oceanic languages, including several in NCV.

In Efatic, *na-* is still a productive prefix used with newly-formed nouns, and productive nominalizations. But with a majority of inherited nouns the the *na-* is lexically either present or absent; if present, it appears in citation forms, and can be omitted only in certain morphosyntactic contexts (Schütz, 1969b, pp. 42–43).

Table 8 gives a few examples of **na*-accreted nouns in Efatic, and Table 9 some with which **na-* does not appear.[6]

[6] The *na-* will generally appear in the citation form of such nouns. For most, there are certain contexts in which the bare noun stem without *na-* may be used, so can be considered an affix; but for some it is invariant – eg **naika* 'fish', **nearu* 'Casuarina'.

The first two Ebau examples in Table 8 show the retention of accreted **na-* with two-vowel (CVCV) bases, and the remainder its loss with longer bases. In Table 9, the first two examples show that a two-vowel noun base, if not **na-* accreted, has its first vowel lengthened. Both of these discriminations seem to have to do with the innovation of a three-mora minimal phonological word in northern Efatic (see section 3.3.2).

There is no evidence of affixation or accretion of **na-* in Namakir. All nouns can be preceded by *na*, except for a small "proper noun" class of pronouns, names and kinship terms, which take *ke* (Sperlich, 1991).

Table 8

	PNCV	NMk	**PEf**	Nguna	Nafsan	Ebau
BANYAN	*baqa	bag	***na-baqa**	na-baga	m-pak n-pek	nepag
COCONUT	*niu	niw	***na-niu**	na-niu	na-niu	naniw
DREAM (n)	*bore	-	***na-bwerea**	na-pwerea	na-pwre	pwere
EAR	*daliga-	tiliga-	***na-daliga-**	na-daliga-	n-talga-	ralge-
KAVA	*maloku	malok	***na-maloku**	na-maloku	n-malok	malok

Table 9

	PNCV	NMk	**PEf**	Nguna	Nafsan	Ebau
BIRD	*manu	man	***maanu**	maanu	maan	maan
RAIN	*ʔusa	ʔih	***uusa**	uusa	us	uus
STAR	*mwazoe	mwahe	***mwasoe**	mwasoe	mwasei	mwase
EGG	*ʔatolu	ʔatol	***atolu**	atolu	atol	atəl

The system of lexically variable **na*-attachment shows definite semantic patterning, as indicated in Table 10.

Table 10

Unattached	***na*-Attached**
Humans	Body Parts
Animals	Plants
Other Inanimates	

The general semantic distribution of the two classes of noun is consistent with Crowley's suggestion that Proto-Oceanic **na* was a marker of inanimate nouns. However, the division of nouns is not simply predictable from semantics; some examples of exceptions to the upper categories: **na-wota* 'chief' and **na-ika* 'fish' have **na-* despite being, respectively, Human and Animal; and **matua* 'right hand' is a Body Part without **na-*. Within the "Other Animates" category there does not appear to be any simple rule:

**bwoogi* 'night' BUT **na-aleatia* 'day'
**vaatu* 'stone' BUT **na-one* 'sand'
**uuvu* 'oven' BUT **na-tau* 'leaves to cover oven'

But whether a given noun is accreted or not is usually consistent across all dialects, so the particular profile of *na*/Ø division can be taken as an innovation of Proto-Efatic.

3 Innovations within Efatic

Here we consider innovations within Efatic which affect more than one dialect, towards a history of its diversification into its present forms.

3.1 North and South

3.1.1 Pronouns

I begin with the independent personal pronouns, which are recorded even in the least well-documented dialects, and which seem likely to be subject to minimal risk of contamination by diffusion.

External evidence plays a role in the reconstruction of some details of the Proto-Efatic pronoun forms that will be used here. Some of this is shown in Table 11. Paamese and three languages of Epi (Lamen, Nul, Burumba), spoken immediately to the north of Efate-Shepherds, are included as representing its putative nearest kin. Note that the medial *-g- in the PEf third person forms is based on agreement between Epi languages and Southern Efate.

Table 11

	1sg	1pl	2sg	2pl	12pl	3sg	3pl
PNCV	*nau	***qa**mami ***qa**mai ***qa**mi	***i**qo	***qa**muyu	***ki**da	***na**ia	***na**ira
Paamese	**i**nau	**ko**mai	**ke**iko	**ka**mi	**i**re	**ke**iye	**ce**ile
Lamen	**o**nu	**o**mami	ko	**a**miyu	**i**sa	**na**ga	**na**la~**la**(la)
Nul	nu	mim	ko	**a**miu	**i**ta	**naŋ**a	**naŋa**la
Burumba	**kiñ**o	**ku**memi	čau	**ka**miu	**ki**to	**na**i	**na**lo
PE-S	***ki**nau	***qa**mami ***ki**qami	***ka**iqo	***ka**muyu	***ki**qida	***naga**ia	***naga**ra
Namakir	**keʔi**nou	**keʔi**qem	**ka**ig	**ka**mi	**keʔi**qit	**ke**nini	**ke**niar
PEf	***ki**nau	***qa**mami ***ki**qami	***ka**igo	***ka**muyu	***ki**qida	***naga**ya	***naga**ra

The analogical changes to be described can best be understood if the pronouns are seen as consisting of a base (which carries the person-number information) and a prefix (marked in bold in the table) which connects with other items in the paradigm and is subject to analogical replacement.

Features of the Proto-Efatic system to note are (i) the opposition between **kV-* or **qV-* prefixes in first and second persons, and **na(ga)-* prefixes in the third person; and (ii) the presence of two first person plural forms, one "double-m" form which has antecedents at least back to PNCV; and another which may be of relatively recent origin, prefixing **ki-* to the even older **qami*.

Table 12

	1sg	1pl	2sg	2pl	12pl	3sg	3pl
PEf	***ki**nau	***qa**mami ***ki**qami	***ka**igo	***ka**muyu	***ki**qida	***na**gaya	***na**gara
Emau	**ki**nou	**ki**gam	**ne**igo	**ki**muu	**ki**gira	**na**ae	**na**ara
Lelepa	**ko**nou	**ki**nim	**na**ago	**ku**muu	**ki**nta	**na**ae	**na**ara
Nguna-Tongoa	**ki**nau	**ki**nami	**ni**igo	**ni**muu	**ni**gida	**na**ae	**na**ara
Sasake	**ki**nau	**ni**qami	**ni**igo	**ni**mui	**ni**gida	**na**ae	**na**ara

Table 12 shows a number of innovations in five Efatic dialects. (Nguna and Tongoa are identical for present purposes.) All these dialects share the loss of medial *-g-* in the third-person. They also show an innovative **nV-* prefixed form in the second person singular. This intrusion of **nV-* forms (shown by shading) is carried further to the second person and inclusive plurals in Nguna and Tongoa, and finally by Sasake to the first person plural. Note also that the "double m" form for 1pl has been lost – all the 1pl forms can be derived from **ki-qami*, with *q* > *g* by regular change (see below) and *g* > *n* by dissimilation from the prefix consonant. This group of dialects can be referred to as Northern.

Table 13

	1sg	1pl	2sg	2pl	12pl	3sg	3pl
PEf	***ki**-nau	***qa**-mami ***ki**-qami	***ka**-igo	***ka**-muyu	***ki**-qida	***na**-gaya	***na**-gara
Emau	**ki**-nou	**ki**-gam	**ne**-igo	**ki**-muu	**ki**-gira	**na**-ae	**na**-ara
Ebau	**ki**-nou	**a**-gam	**a**-ag	**e**-gu	**e**-gir	**e**-ne	**e**-ner

Ebau—unfortunately the least well-documented dialect in this survey – appears to be among the most innovative. Table 13 shows the pronouns of Ebau, compared with PEf and with its near neighbour Emau. Ebau appears to have reduced most pronouns to monosyllabic form, and added new prefixes, which may in fact be prothetic vowels to bring them up to minimal weight. Nevertheless, it appears to share two early innovative features with the dialects of Table 12: (i) loss of medial *-g-* in both third person pronouns; (ii) derivation of 1pl from **-qami* rather than **-mami.* I therefore tentatively add Ebau to the Northern group.

Table 14

	1sg	1pl	2sg	2pl	12pl	3sg	3pl
PEf	***ki**nau	***qa**mami ***ki**qami	***ka**igo	***ka**muyu	***ki**qida	***naga**ya	***naga**ra
Eton	**ki**nou	**ko**mam	**ka**ag	**ka**mus	**ka**nte	**nega**	**nege**r
Nafsan	(**ki**)neu	**ko**mam	ag	**a**kam	**a**kit	**nega**	**(n)ga**r

Now we consider the remaining two dialects, in the south (Table 14). There are two conspicuous common features of Eton and Nafsan: (i) they have preserved the "double-m" version of the 1pl pronoun (and in fact have the same reflex); and (ii) they have preserved the medial *-g-* in the third person. None of the innovative **nV-* forms of the North are in evidence. But this is a conservative feature.

Common innovations are the vowel change (*a* > *o*) in 1pl, and the selection of the "double-m" alternative in 1pl (as the Northern dialects share a common selection of **kiqami*). The 2pl form in Eton shows strengthening of **y* > *s*, as seen above in HOUSE, STRONG, and the transitive suffix, but in another slightly different environment (*u__u*). The same *-s-* appears in Nafsan in the 2pl object/possessive form *(ga)mus* (Thieberger 2006:104).

The Eton 12pl presumably derives, like Lelepa *kinta*, through medial vowel loss followed by assimilation (**-qid-* > **-git-* > **-gt-* > **-nt-*). In other respects, Eton looks like a very reasonable derivation from PEf, with all the **kV-* prefixes preserved, Nafsan has been reduced more radically (esp. 2sg 2pl 12pl) in a way reminiscent of Ebau.

These two dialects will be known as Southern.

3.1.2 Other Northern and Southern lexical innovations

Here we consider some lexical innovations that give further evidence for Northern and Southern innovation centres.

Table 15

	SUN	SKIN	COCONUT MAT	3pl Sub Pron	1pl Sub Pron
PNCV	*yalo	*kuli-	(POC *tabakau)	*ra	*(ka)mV
Namakir	ʔal	kil-i-	tovoko	ri/ru	mu
Sasake	**eelo**	**nawili-**	***katavau***	**eu**	**au**
Tongoa	**eelo**	**nawili-**	***katafau***	**eu**	**au**
Nguna	**eelo**	**nawili-**	**tokovau**	**eu**	**au**
Lelepa	**eelo**	**nawil**	tafkau	ur	**au**
Emau	**eelo**	nakuli-	**tokfou**	**eu**	**au**
Ebau	**eel**	kulu-	tefkou	ru	mu
Eton	al	kulu-	tefkou	-	-
Nafsan	aal	nak(u)l-u-	tefkau	ru	u

Table 15 shows three innovations in lexical items shared by several Northern dialects. All of these affect the "core Northern" group of Sasake, Tongoa and Nguna, but less consistently the other Northern dialects (Lelepa, Emau, Ebau).

The *a > e change in SUN is probably influenced by the (lost) *y; in fact *a > e / y__ may be a regular change in the North.

The two metathesized forms of the word for 'coconut-leaf mat' from the original TPK (dental-labial-velar) order can be most economically accounted for if we assume, first, a shift to TKP (still reflected in Nguna and Emau) followed by a further metathesis to KTP (in Sesake and Tongoa).

Table 16

	LIGHTNING	WHO?	ROPE
PNCV	*vila	*sei	*tali
Namakir	vil	ke-he	tal
Sasake	nevila	sei	natali
Tongoa	navila	sei	natali
Nguna	navila	seei	natali
Emau	nafila	se	n(a)tal(i)
Ebau	nafil	sei	-
Lelepa	nafla	sei	ntal
Eton	**napil**	**fe**	**matte**
Nafsan	**napil**	**fei**	**nmarit**

Table 16 shows three lexical changes uniquely shared by the Southern dialects Eton and Nafsan. PEf **na-tali* 'rope' is replaced in the South by reflexes of **na-marita*, originally 'guts'.

Table 17

	BREADFRUIT	PANDANUS SP.	LONG
PNCV	*batavu	*barovu	*baravu
Namakir	batav	barov	birerev
Sasake	**nabatau**	**nabarou**	**parau**
Tongoa	**nabatau**	**nabarou**	**parau**
Nguna	**napetau**	**naparou**	**parau**
Lelepa	**naptau**	**nbarou**	**prau**
Emau	nap(a)taf	naparof	parafu
Ebau	petaf	parof	peraf
Eton	***petam***	***paarom***	***pram***
Nafsan	***naptam***	***nparom***	***pram***

Table 17 shows separate developments in the sequence *-*vu#*. The historic **v* survives in Namakir, and (with regular final vowel loss and devoicing) in Emau-Ebau. In a core Northern group including Lelepa, the **v* is lost (cf. Table 5 above); in the South it becomes *m*.

3.2 Cross-Border Innovations

We have seen evidence for an early division in Efatic between one group of dialects developing in the north, and another separately in the south. Even if contact between the two groups was reduced for a time, continued expansion of settlement would inevitably have brought speakers of the two dialect chains into close enough contact that innovations could spread across the historic boundary. We consider a number of innovations whose results can be seen in two or more neighbouring dialects, at least one from either side of the North-South divide.

Table 18

	EAT
PNCV	*kani
Namakir	qan
Sasake	kanikani
Tongoa	kanikani
Nguna	kanikani
Emau	ngani
Ebau	gankan
Lelepa	**faam(i)**
Eton	**fam**
Nafsan	**fa(a)m**

Nafsan and Eton (Southern), but also Lelepa (Northern), replace the familiar Oceanic **kani* ‘eat’, with **vaami* (probably originally ‘have’).[7]

[7] This conjecture is based on comparison of Efatic *vaami ‘eat’ with Namakir *baʔam* ‘have; there is’, *vaʔamean* ‘property’.

Table 19

	TREE	WILD CANE	COCONUT CRAB
PNCV	*kayu	*uyu	CV **ayu
Namakir	ka	ʔe, ʔo	noʔe
Sasake	nakau	naau	eeu
Tongoa	nakau	naau	-
Nguna	nakau	naau	eeu
Emau	nakou	naau	**aasu**
Ebau	nokou	-ou	**as**
Lelepa	**nkas(u)**	**nous**	**aasu**
Eton	**nekas**	**naus**	**aas**
Nafsan	**nkas**	**naus**	**aas**

Table 19 shows three more instances of **y*-strengthening, in an environment (__ *u#*) not unlike that seen in HOUSE, STRONG, and the grammatical morphemes mentioned above (Table 6), for which a Proto-Efatic change was postulated. Evidence of this episode of strengthening, however, is confined to the Southern dialects plus Lelepa (in one item probably further borrowed into Ebau and Emau).

Table 20

	HOW MANY?	NAME
PNCV	*visa	*kisa
Namakir	vih	kih-a-
Sasake	piisa	nagisa-
Tongoa	pisa	nagisa-
Nguna	viisa	nagisa-
Emau	piisa	nagisa
Ebau	**epii**	**gie-**
Lelepa	**piia**	**nagi(a)-**
Eton	**epi**	**g(i)e-**
Nafsan	**ipi(i)**	**nagi-e-**

Another small change (**s > Ø / i__a#*) appears to link two words in both Lelepa and Epau as well as the Southern area (Table 20).

Table 21

	FLOW	RAW	WIND	LONG	SUGARCANE
PEf	*sara	*mata	*na-lagi	*baravu	*na-bwarae
Ebau	éser	émet	nélag	peraf	pwerae
Eton	ser	-	lag	pram	pwerei
Nafsan	ser	met	nlag	pram	napwrai

A more general change is the dissimilation of short *a > e / __Ca, which applies to many words in Nafsan, Eton and Ebau (Table 21).

Table 22

(repeating examples from Table 8)

	COCONUT	BANYAN	EAR	DREAM	KAVA
PEf	*na-niu	*na-paga	*na-daliga-	*na-bwore	*na-maloku
Emau	naniu	napaga	naraliga-	napwerea	namaloku
Ebau	nániw	nepag	**ralge-**	**pwere**	**malok**
Eton	naniu	nepog	**talga-**	**pwere**	**malok**
Nafsan	naniu	mpak	ntalge-	napwre	nmalok

The loss of accreted **na-* from noun bases of three or more moras is shared by two neighbouring dialects, Eton (S) and Ebau (N) (Table 22).

Table 23

	FISH	ONE	LONG AGO	1s IND PR	HEAD	ALIVE	REEF
PEf	*naika	*sikai	*tuai	*kinau	*na-pwau-	*mauri	*na-sakau
Emau	**neika**	**sikei**	**tuei**	**kinou**	**napwou-**	**mouri**	**nasokou**
Ebau	**neik**	**síkei**	**tuei**	**kínou**	**pwou-**	**móur**	**sokou**
Eton	**neik**	**eskei**	**tuei**	**kinou**	**pwou-**	**mour**	**-nsokou**
Nafsan	naik	**skei**	**tuei**	**kineu**	npwau-	**-**	nskau
Lelepa	**neika**	**skei**	**tuei**	**konou**	**npwou-**	**(mour)**	naskau

Another case suggesting an "Eastern" innovation area is the regular assimilation of **ai* > *ei* and **au* > *ou* (at least in final position) in Eton, Ebau and Emau (Table 23).

Further work will be required to establish where these forms result from a shared sound change, and where from subsequent borrowing. All we can be fairly sure of is that they represent a later historic period than the "proto-Northern" and "proto-Southern" innovations.

3.3 Wide-area sound changes

The sound changes discussed here (reduction of contrasts in voiced obstruents, vowel loss) affect many dialects, northern and southern.

3.3.1 The voiced obstruents

These consonants (PEf *b, *bw, *d, *dr, *q, *v) retain their voicing and prenasalization in some languages throughout the NCV region (Clark 2009:10). They are well preserved in Namakir (except in word-final position where the stops are replaced by the corresponding nasal continuants). In Efatic the series largely disappears (except for the northernmost dialects) through a combination of phonetic devoicing and mergers (Table 24).

Table 24[8]

Labial obstruents *b *bw *v

PNCV	*b	*bw	*v
Namakir	[^{m}b]/[m]	[^{m}b^{w}]/[m^{w}]	[v]
Tongoa Sasake	[^{m}b],[p]	[^{m}b^{w}],[p^{w}]	[v],[f]
All other Efatic	[p]	[p^{w}]	[f]

As shown by the tables in Tryon (1976, pp. 11–16), loss of voice and prenasalization in these consonants is a widespread development in NCV languages, including North Ambrym and several Epi dialects, among Efatic's closer relatives. Within Efatic the voiced and prenasalized variants survive only in Tongoa-Sasake, and even there are well attested only initially in nouns with the *na-* prefix.[9] This suggests that they are a relic, and that the devoicing process was already underway in PEf.

Table 25. Mergers of *q

PNCV	*k	*q [^{ŋ}g]	*g [ŋ]
Namakir	k	q/g	g
Sasake	k	q	g
Nafsan	k		
All others	k	g	

Proto-Efatic, like Namakir, retained three contrasting velar consonants: **k *q *ŋ*. Within Efatic, this is maintained only in Sasake; elsewhere **q* disappears through merger -- in Nafsan, to /k/; elsewhere, to /g/ (Table 25).

Sasake retains *q* in all environments. One might expect the same of Tongoan. Unfortunately, two important sources (Miller, Rivierre) use ambiguous notations (<g> or <ng>) in places where /q/ might be expected. However Tryon's list for Woraviu (Tongoa) shows *taŋau* 'fish-hook' and *-ŋu* '1sg possessive' beside Sasake *ta^{ŋ}gau* and *-^{ŋ}gu*, which suggests that at least this Tongoan dialect has followed the general merger.

Table 26. *d and *dr

PNCV	*d	*dr
Namakir	d/n	
Tongoa-Sasake	d	
Nguna	d,t,r	
Lelepa, Eton	t	
Emau, Ebau	r	
Nafsan	[t]	[^{n}r]

[8] Separation of multiple reflexes in the table by slash (/) indicates that a clear phonological environment determines which one occurs. Separation by comma indicates the absence of such a determinant.

[9] But both *bw* and *pw* also occur in enough other words to suggest that a phonemic contrast has developed. E.g. from my Sasake notes ***bw**agaroro* 'cowrie', (kai) ***pw**aara* 'bivalve sp.'; from Patteson *na**mbw**e* 'club', *ta**q**es* 'adze'. (*q* is the Mota orthography used by Patteson for *pw*.)

The POC consonants *d (counterpart of *t) and *dr (counterpart of *r) have apparently merged in most NCV languages; however, it has been suggested that the distinction might have survived in PNCV, based on apparently distinct reflexes in South Efate (Nafsan) (Clark 2009:11-12). This now seems pretty well supported, as can be seen by comparing the two body-part terms 'blood' and 'ear', and the realis forms of the two numerals 'two' and 'three' where Nafsan has *t* < **d* and *nr* < **dr* (Table 26, Table 27).

Table 27

	BLOOD	EAR	TWO	THREE
POC	*draRaq	*taliŋa	*rua	*tolu
PNCV	*daRa	*daliga	*drua	*dolu
Nguna	na-daa	na-daliga	duua	doolu
Nafsan	nraa	ntalig	nru	tol

As in the previous sets, prenasalized stop reflexes (of the merged consonant *d*) are found only in Tongoa and Sasake – in this case without restriction.

Nguna *d* has proved elusive to researchers. Capell (1957:220) heard "a voiceless retroflexed consonant, sometimes slightly affricated". Schütz (1969b, pp. 14–15) attempted (unconvincingly) to analyse [d] as an allophone of /t/. In Tryon's lists (Tryon 1976, Lists 152-154), items with <d> in Nguna (about 30 of them) mostly show <t> in the closely related dialects of Pwele and Siviri, but occasionally <d> or <r>, following no obvious pattern. It is possible that all this is evidence of a *d* > *t* merger in progress. New research will hopefully clarify this matter.

Elsewhere in Efatic, *d merges with *t in Lelepa and Eton, and with *r in Emau and Ebau. If we assume that Nafsan and Eton have a shared "Southern" history, both the **q/g/k* and **d/dr* contrasts must have persisted to the "Proto-Southern" stage. Nafsan subsequently merged **q* > *k*, and **d* > *t*, while Eton merged **q* > *g* and both **d* and **dr* > *t.* In these changes it may have been influenced by dialects in the Northern group.

3.3.2 Vowel loss and stress

There are not many regular changes in vowel quality within Efatic, apart from the local and restricted ones mentioned above. But one conspicuous difference in comparing, say, Nguna with Nafsan is that the former seems to have retained essentially all of the vowels inherited from Proto-Oceanic, whereas the latter has dropped a lot of them.

One example is shown in Table 28: PEf **na-vinaga* '(vegetable) food' > Nguna *navinaga*, Nafsan *nafnag*. I have numbered the vowels from the right, which will make it easier to compare different historic systems.

Table 28

	V4	V3	V2	V1
PEf	*na	vi	na	ga
Nguna	na	vi	na	ga
Nafsan	na	f	na	g

The pattern illustrated here may be called V3-deletion. Further examples are shown in Table 29. V3-deletion applies only to short vowels other than *a*. A separate process deletes final vowels after a consonant or higher vowel. Both of these must follow the *a > e dissimilation process described in the previous section, to account for the forms of, e.g. OUTRIGGER and HEAVY.

Table 29

	PEf	Nafsan
SEA	*natasi	**ntas**
TARO	*natale	**ntal**
OUTRIGGER	*nasama	**nsem**
HOUSE	*nasumwa	**nasumw**
HUNGRY	*pitolo	**ptol**
FEAR	*mataku	**mtak**
STEAL	*panako	**pnak**
HEAVY	*madaga	**mten**
RIGHT	*matua	**matu**
BATHE	*loloso	**los**
THUMB	*kinilapa	**kinlep**
COC. LEAF MAT	*tavakau	**tefkau**
BUSH	*namalasi	**namlas**

Defining the exact conditions for V3 loss in Nafsan is complex indeed, as it is an ongoing process (Billington et al., 2020). The picture is further complicated by the occurrence of numerous V3-deleted words in all other dialects south of Nguna. Table 30 shows a small selection.

Table 30

	PEF	Nafsan	Eton	Ebau	Emau	Lelepa
SEA	*natasi	**ntas**	**ntas**	**ntas**	**ntas(i)**	**ntas(i)**
TARO	*natale	**ntal**	**ntal**	**ntal**	**ntale**	**ntale**
HUNGRY	*pitolo	**ptol**	**ptol**	**ptol**	**ptolo**	**ptol(o)**
FEAR	*mataku	**mtak**	**mtak**	**émtak**	**mtaku**	**mtak**
BATHE	*loloso	**los**	**los**	**ellos**	**lloso**	**los**
THUMB	*kinilapa	**kinlep**	**kinlepa-**	**kinlep**	**kinlapa**	**kinlap(a)**
HEAVY	*madaga	**mten**	**mten**	mérag	maraga	**mtan(a)**
SICK	*masaki	**msak**	**msak**	mésak	masaki	**msak**
STEAL	*panako	**pnak**	**pnak**	penak	panako	**pnak**
LONG	*paravu	**pram**	**pram**	peraf	paraf(u)	**prau**
ONE	*sikai	**skei**	**eskei**	síkei	sikei	**skei**
SHARP	*makali	**mkal**	**mkal**	makal	makal(i)	**m(a)kali**
BE WITH	*pilake	**plak**	**plake**	-	pilake	**plak**
RAIL SP.	*pwilake	**pwlak**	-	pwílak	pwilak(e)	**pwlak(e)**
WARM, HOT	*vitinu	**ftin**	efitin	fitin	futun(u)	**ftunu**
FIRE	*nakapu	**nkap**	nekap	nakap	nakap(u)	**nkap(u)**
FOOD	*navinaga	**nafnag**	fineg	finag	naf(i)naga	**nafnag**
MOON	*atelagi	**atlag**	tilag	telag	at(e)lag	**atlag**
BUSH	*namalasi	**namlas**	-	melas	namalas(i)	**namlas**
MEAT	*napwokasi	**napwkas**	pwekas	pwakas	napwokasi	**napwkas**
FIGHT (n)	*navakalo	**nafkal**	-	fakal	nafakalo	**nafkal**
FISH HOOK	*taqau	**tkau**	togou	togou	togou	tagau

The table suggests that the most extensive V3-deletion occurs in Nafsan, with nearly as many cases in Lelepa, and diminishing numbers with diminishing distance from Nafsan. Regardless of whether these forms are the result of a phonological process going on in several dialects (at different rates and with different conditions), or simply extensive borrowing, one thing is consistent: V3 is lost, and often so is V1; but V2 survives. This pattern would seem to make sense only within a language in which V2 was the stressed vowel (penultimate stress). Is Nafsan such a language?

Recent research suggests that in Nafsan "there is a strong preference for words to be more prominent at the right edge. Analyses of disyllabic and trisyllabic words produced in an utterance-medial frame show a clear pattern of higher fundamental frequency values in final compared to preceding syllables." (Billington et al. 2023:527-8). Given the general loss of V1 in this language, the pattern amounts to V2 stress.

A complete survey of stress systems in Efatic is not feasible at present, given the lack of descriptive data on most. Nevertheless, we may see some plausible outlines and a historical shift which is of interest.

At the Proto-Oceanic level, there is respectable opinion that regular penultimate (V2) stress was a property of Proto-Oceanic and preserved by the more conservative modern

languages (Ross 1998, p. 18; Lynch et al., 2002, p. 35).[10] Among close relatives of Efatic, Lamen of Epi has regular penultimate (V2) stress (Early, 2002, p. 672). And Namakir, which has lost V1 as thoroughly as Nafsan has, presents today with stress on the final vowel, which is historically V2. This might lead one to suppose that Proto-Efatic also had V2 stress, and that the pattern in Nafsan is directly inherited from this. But Nguna presents a contrast.

Schütz (1969b, p. 10) does not discuss stress as such in Nguna, but finds a falling intonation contour at the end of declarative sentences which places prominence on the antepenultimate syllable (Table 31).

Table 31

Pitch level	2			3	1	1
na-tau waina 'that year'	na	ta	u	wa	i	na
e taa pwarua 'it's not big'	e	ta	a	pwa	ru	a

A more recent study interprets this in terms of "a three-mora measure preference": ś s s with a "greater degree of intensity (dB)" on the first mora (McClintock, 1991, pp. 88–89). I will consider this as antepenultimate (V3) stress.

Table 32 shows stress-marked Lamen examples from Early, compared with their Namakir and Nguna cognates.

Table 32

PNCV	*ika 'fish'	*mate 'dead'	*ʔuta 'landward'	*tama-na 'father-3s'	*dua-lima 'ten'
Lamen	íka	máre	úra	arimána	lualíma
Namakir	na ík	e mát	a-ʔít	ke-tamán	dualím
Nguna	**náika**	**é-mate**	**é-uta**	**támana**	**duálima**

Note that Nguna in many cases places the stress on a particle, not part of the historic base (see na- 'noun prefix' e- '3s subject marker' and e- 'locative prefix' in the table). This can be understood as a consequence or concomitant of a shift to a three-mora minimum phonological word. The lengthening of the first vowel in two-vowel nouns without **na*-attachment, mentioned above (see Table 9), might be part of the same regime change.

For most other varieties, I have only my own field notes to go on. I made no written notations of stress in Sasake, probably because it seemed to agree with Nguna which I was already used to hearing. My recordings tend to confirm this. For Emau and Ebau, all my stress markings agree that V3 is predominant.[11] The Lelepa situation is especially complicated and will be discussed below

[10]Lynch (2000) argues for a different reconstruction of Proto-Oceanic stress, but admits that the V2 system is widespread, particularly in languages which have lost POC final consonants.

[11]Examples of Ebau V3 stress: PEf **e-mate* '(is) dead' > Eb *émat*, **a-rogo* 'I hear' > *árog*, **madada* 'rotten (wood)' > *mérer*, **na-lagi* 'wind' > *nélag*, **tokoana* 'village' > **tokóon*, **sikai* 'one' > *síkei*. Although the majority of Ebau words in my sample have stress on historic V3, in a small number it appears on V4 or even earlier, e.g. **e-mataku* '(is) afraid' > *émtak*, **ano-tano* 'lie down' > *ántan*. Here it appears the leftward shift of

On the basis of this fragmentary evidence, one might conjecture that a shift of stress from V2 to V3 has taken place in all the Northern dialects.

Now a language with V3 stress ought to have a different pattern of vowel loss. It would be identifiable by loss of V2 and survival of V3. There are a few examples of this in Emau, but only in Lelepa do we find significant numbers of words showing this pattern of vowel loss (Table 33).

Table 33

PEf	Emau	Lelepa
*na-ruru 'earthquake'	**narru**	
*madada 'rotten'	**marra**	
*manivenive 'thin'		**manfénfe**
*meso 'rotten (food)'		**émso**
*salala 'fish sp.'	**salla**	**sálla**
*nanu-na 'child-3s'		**nánna**

Lacrampe (2014, pp. 58–64) devotes several pages to describing the Lelepa system of word stress assignment, which seems to defy reduction to any simple rule. Many words have variant forms, either with different stress positions or with and without V1. From the 50 or so stress-marked words in Lacrampe's discussion, together with a similar number from my own field notes, it is clear that both V2 and V3-stressed words are present. This correlates with the fact that Lelepa uniquely has significant numbers of words both with V3 loss (Table 30) and V2 loss (Table 33).

Lelepa has been assigned to the Northern dialect group, on the basis of its independent personal pronoun forms and some other shared innovations; its overall shared-cognate percentages are also somewhat better with Northern dialects than with Southern (Clark, 1985a, Table I). The complexity of its stress patterns thus probably results from large-scale borrowing from a Southern source, of material which has not been integrated into a single regular system of stress placement.

4 Conclusions

Efatic is a well-defined subgroup. An early division into Northern and Southern dialects is supported by pronoun forms. Significant changes continued within these two zones, particularly in a core area of the North (Nguna, Tongoa, Sasake). Eventually North and South came into close contact, with considerable linguistic diffusion at the interfaces (Lelepa, Eton, Ebau). Chronology of these many changes awaits further research, and especially better documentation of all dialects.

A Note on Kuwae

The extreme homogeneity of the dialects of Tongoa, Sasake and Nguna, despite their geographic separation, has suggested a relatively recent spread of these dialects from North

stress has applied to a word in which V3 has already been lost (whether by local phonological change or through borrowing from another dialect).

Efate in the aftermath of the catastrophic 15th-century eruption of Kuwae volcano (Clark, 1996). The scenario presented there was that all or almost all of the original population of Kuwae either perished, or fled and was absorbed into the populations of other islands. The new population of Tongoa and the other islands thus consisted mainly of people from outside the immediate area, described, perhaps unkindly, as "opportunists".

Local traditions, however, assert that in addition to the *in situ* survivors (the woman who hid in a cave, the man who sheltered inside a slitgong), many Kuwae people had left their homes in view of the increasing seismic threat, and returned when it was safe to do so (Ballard, 2020). The re-settlers were thus people from these islands, who bore legitimate title to the lands they occupied.

The evidence reviewed in this paper does not seem to require revision of the basic premise of my argument – that the closeness of Sasake and Tongoa dialects to Nguna indicates very recent dispersal. (If we had not known about Kuwae, we might have attributed it to armed conquest.)

But suppose we interpret the oral traditions with a little latitude, and say that refugees from Kuwae lived for a time (perhaps even a generation or two) on North Efate, and while maintaining an awareness of their origins and some social cohesion, nevertheless underwent language shift. The descendants of the original refugees thus returned to Tongoa and the other islands as speakers of an Efatic influenced by the language or languages of Kuwae (still largely lost to us).

This suggests an alternative explanation for the presence in the far northern dialects of voiced and prenasalized obstruents, which are devoiced and denasalized everywhere on Efate. Instead of a "conservative" retention, they might equally well be explained as a substrate effect. This would certainly work for the labial consonants, where the changes, as noted above, are purely phonetic. In the case of *d, *dr and *q, however, the re-settlement would have had to take place before the *d/*dr and *q/*g mergers took place. (Similar difficulties emerge if we attempt to explain these by close contact with Namakir.)

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