Introduction: Vanuatu language structures

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The Special Issue on Vanuatu language structures focuses on the morphology, syntax and lexicon of Vanuatu languages. The articles in this issue use methods from language documentation and description, elicitation of grammaticality judgements in the tradition of generative syntax, and experimental methods using visual stimuli, to explore the structural aspects of language use in Vanuatu.

The first four articles tackle aspects of the morphosyntax of nominal phrases in Oceanic languages of Vanuatu. In their articles, Manfred Krifka and Elizabeth Pearce focus on use of determiners, especially to express anaphora, in Daakie (South Ambrym) and Unua (Malekula) respectively. This is an area of morphosyntax that shows a lot of variation between languages and evidence of historical change across Vanuatu languages. The next two articles both focus on the distinctive expression of possessive relationships in Vanuatu's Oceanic languages. The authors build on descriptions of individual languages to explore regional (Andrew Gray on a group of languages in Northern Vanuatu) and genetic patterns (Catriona Malau and Amy Dewar on Vanuatu's Polynesian outlier languages), both of which have implications for understanding language change in contact situations. This area of linguistic structure is especially important because of its connection to the expression of cultural values in Vanuatu, and especially kinship relationships, an area further explored in Miriam Meyerhoff's contribution on kinship terms in East Santo.

The remaining articles address issues in clause structure. Rachel Miles and Rachel Mayberry explore strategies for marking subjects and objects used by a cohort of deaf children in Port Vila, using visual stimuli in a game-based study to show how the children's signing develops over the course of a year. Jens Hopperdietzel explores the status of subject-markers in Daakaka with implications for the analysis of subject-marking morphemes in other Oceanic languages of Vanuatu. Saurov Syed and Aly Turrell explore bipartite negation in Nduindui, showing how various formal analyses in the literature fail to account for the patterns in the language, an account which could also inform the analysis of multiple expression of negation in other Vanuatu languages.

Together these articles demonstrate how Vanuatu's rich linguistic diversity contributes to cross-linguistic understanding of language structure. Many of the articles apply formal analytical frameworks from generative syntax (Pierce; Hopperdietzel; Syed & Turrell), showing how language description and syntactic analysis can mutually inform each other, as more Vanuatu languages are documented in sufficient detail to support these detailed analyses. Miles and Mayberry's longitudinal experiment has major implications for our understanding of the emergence of argument marking strategies in new sign languages. This Special Issue shows that the value and importance of documenting and describing Vanuatu's languages lies not only in the cultural and community significance illustrated in the other Special Issues, but also in their potential to enrich our understanding of human language.

We will now introduce each article in turn. Manfred Krifka's article "Demonstrative and anaphoric reference in Daakie (Ambrym, Vanuatu) with special focus on associative anaphors", describes the complex system of demonstratives in Daakie. His careful description of Daakie's various strategies for expressing anaphoric relationships shows how they work together to serve the important function of tracking referents in discourse.

In "Article loss and article gain in the Unua DP?", Elizabeth Pearce discusses the evolution of demonstratives in Unua, a Malekula language, using a formal syntax framework. The paper seeks to determine the location of the anaphorics *ngo* and *nga* within the determiner phrase, as well as investigating a possible grammaticalisation pathway towards their article-like status. This is situated within the context of the historical loss of the well-attested Proto-Oceanic **na* article.

In his article "The *bula-* possessive classifier in northern Vanuatu languages: An attempt at a worthless explanation", Andrew Gray looks at the function of possessive classifiers with forms reflecting **bula-* used to mark possession of crops, livestock and a range of cultural possessions and relationships in a group of 28 languages of Northern Vanuatu. These languages do not form a coherent sub-group of Vanuatu's Oceanic languages, so it is possible that the regional feature has been diffused through language contact. While early descriptions of this classifier explained it as related to value or specifically economic value, Gray argues that the primary association is with cultivation of living animals and plants, while other functions can be explained by extension from this core meaning.

Catriona Malau and Amy Dewar look at the distinctive marking of possession in Vanuatu's Polynesian outlier languages in their article "Change and variation in the possessive systems of the Vanuatu Polynesian Outliers". They show how the Polynesian distinction between *a* and *o* categories of possession has developed differently in Vanuatu's three Polynesian outliers. By comparing older descriptions of the languages with data collected in recent fieldwork, they demonstrate how the systems have continued to change over the last few decades, influenced by contact with neighbouring Vanuatu languages and

Bislama. While all three languages appear to use fewer strategies for marking possession than in earlier descriptions, there is complex variation in the use and combination of these strategies in contemporary Futuna-Aniwa and Ifira-Mele. The article finishes by looking closely at possessive marking of kinship terms which show the greatest diversity in use of possessive strategies, including direct suffixation patterns that are clearly influenced by neighbouring Vanuatu languages.

Variation in expression of kinship is also the focus of Miriam Meyerhoff's contribution "Kinship terms in Nkep (East Santo)". She discusses the kinship system in Hog Harbour from a semantic, morphological and sociolinguistic perspective. The article investigates Bislama borrowings into the kinship system, children's acquisition of the system, and the effects of social change.

The final three articles move on to clause structure. The first of these is Rachel Miles and Rachel Mayberry's article "Argument marking in a new sign language". As contextualised in the sign language contributions in the other two special issues, Vanuatu does not (yet) have a national sign language. However, community sign languages have often emerged in educational contexts when deaf children are brought together and communicate with each other. Miles and Mayberry report on a longitudinal study with a recently formed cohort of deaf children at a school in Port Vila, some of whom had had the opportunity to visit a residential school for deaf children in Fiji. Using picture stimuli, they track the strategies children used for distinguishing subjects and objects in simple clauses, using mixed effects regression modelling to investigate the factors determining which strategies are used. Over the course of a single year, there were indicators of emerging conventions and greater use of spatial strategies, in ways that could not be explained by contact with Fiji Sign Language. This study has important implications for our understanding of the emergence of grammatical structure in new sign languages around the world.

Jens Hopperdietzel investigates the marking of subjects in an Oceanic language of Vanuatu in his contribution "Distinguishing subjects from topics: On (differential) subject marking in Daakaka". Most Oceanic languages of Vanuatu have pre-verbal subject markers that are variously analysed as prefixes, clitics or particles (Lynch, Ross & Crowley, 2002). Hopperdietzel argues that subject markers in Daakaka are agreement markers rather than pronominal clitics, by showing that noun phrases referring to the subject argument and co-occurring with pre-verbal subject markers cannot be analysed as topics. His findings and diagnostics can inform the analysis of pre-verbal subject marking in other Oceanic languages.

In their article "Bipartite negation in Nduindui: Empirical generalisations and theoretical challenges", Saurov Syed and Aly Turrell also use methods of generative syntax to explore negation in Nduindui, arguing that formal analyses of bipartite negation in other languages in the literature cannot account for the specific features of negation in Nduindui, nor for other Vanuatu languages with similar negation strategies. Their careful application of analyses that have been developed to account for cross-linguistic patterns in negation to newly collected data in Nduindui demonstrates the great potential of Vanuatu languages to contribute to our understanding of the structure of human language, showing the importance of careful description of Vanuatu's under-documented languages.

References

Lynch, J., Ross, M., & Crowley, T. (Eds.). (2002). *The Oceanic languages*. Curzon Press.