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GENDER AND NOUN-CLASS MARKING IN SOME LANGUAGES OF NORTH AND CENTRAL VANUATU

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Abstract

This paper investigates nominal classification in some Oceanic languages of north and central Vanuatu, an issue that was partly identified and documented as early as 1891. Through observation, this study shows how some languages classify gender morphologically through prefixation. Although literature documents both grammatical and natural genders, this study focuses on natural gender of real-world entities. Like the gender classification system, this study further shows how some birds and plants are also classified morphologically.

Keywords: nominal classification; gender marking; noun-class marking; north and central Vanuatu

Introduction

Various systems of grammatically encoded nominal classification have been identified and documented in various languages, in the areas of noun classes, numeral classifiers, classificatory verbs and gender systems (Sent, 2000:1). In the area of linguistic gender systems, gender marking is not necessarily restricted to the biological concept of male or female. According to Swann et al. (2004:120), gender refers to a means of classifying nouns into groups of certain classes. This occurs in a wide range of languages, including many Indo-European languages, the Dravidian languages of South India, the Bantu languages of Africa and many Australian languages. In a broader linguistic context, gender marking is divided into grammatical gender and natural gender (Crystal 1997:164; Matthews 1997:142;

Swann et al 2004:120). Although this paper considers gender marking and noun-class marking in some languages of Vanuatu (notably, in the northern region) as two different concepts, some scholars might consider them to be different aspects of the same concept. Grammatical gender affects the grammatical relationships between words in sentences, such as adjectives agreeing with nouns in German, Latin and French, but natural gender refers to the sex of real-world entities. Gender marking in the languages of Northern Vanuatu would be categorised under natural gender, since it has no morphological implications, such as, for example, agreements affecting the lexicon or grammar of the language (as in the German, Romance or Bantu languages).

Noun class marking through the morphological process of prefixation is another aspect in the languages of South Santo, particularly in the languages of Tangoa, Tamambo and Araki in the northern part of Vanuatu. According to Senft (1991), this type of noun class marking is obvious in the broader Austronesian context.

Genetically, the Vanuatu languages in this study belong to the Proto North and Central Vanuatu (PNCV) language group (Clark, 2009), and within the broader linguistic context, they are Proto Oceanic (POc) languages (Lynch et. al 2002), a subgroup within the great Austronesian language family.

Gender marking in Tangoa and Araki

Observation and documented studies on various languages within the South and South-west of Santo show a common trend in the morphological marking of gender in traditional names. The prefix *ve-* in Tangoa was first documented by Rev Annand (1891:4) for traditional personal names and later by Ray (1926:358) as the female gender marking in Tangoa. The female gender marker *ve-* was also documented for

the Tasiriki language of South-west Santo by Ray (1926:372) and for the Araki language by François (2002:50), while *vo-* with this function was documented by Jauncey (1997:129) for the Tamambo language of western Malo. The Narango and Wailapa languages of South Santo also mark female traditional names with the prefix *ve-*, which further establishes it as a common feminine prefix in the areas of South and South-West Santo.

Gender marking is not restricted to traditional names only; it also distinguishes the sex of various kin terms, as illustrated in Table 1. So *tasi* ‘young sibling’ and *tavai* ‘older sibling’ (sex unspecified) use the prefixes *o*=male, *ve*=female to determine the sex.

Gender marking further encompasses kin and relationship terms in Tangoa, Araki and Tamambo. Gender marking in Tangoa goes beyond kin and relationship terms, as illustrated in the following instances:

- asking about or referring to family relationships (1a-b),
- asking which person one is referring to (2)
- referring to someone who has died (3a-b)
- describing a person’s character (4a-b, (5a-b), (6a-b)
- referring to/describing a person’s physical appearance (7a-b), (8a-b)

1(a) *Enia, sava-m?*

3SG O-what-2SG?

‘What is his relationship to you?’ OR ‘How is he related to you?’

1 (b) *Enia, ve-sava-ra?*

3SG FEM-what-1PL.I

What is her relationship to us? OR ‘How is she related to us?’

- 2 *ve-sava*
FEM-What
'What woman/female (are you referring to)?'
- 3 (a) *tihai*
O-deceased
'The deceased male'
- 3 (b) *ve-tihai*
FEM-deceased
'The deceased female'
- 4 (a) *maloko vari*
O-lazy nature
'lazy man'
- 4 (b) *ve-maloko vari*
FEM-lazy nature
'lazy woman'
- 5 (a) *enia, batu rilang matea*
3SG, O-head strong ART.
'He is a stubborn male'
- 5 (b) *ve-batu rilang*
FEM-head strong
'stubborn female'
- 6 (a) *tangtang rere*
O-cry often
'male who always cries'
- 6 (b) *ve-tangtang rere*
FEM-cry often
'female who always cries'
- 7 (a) *vul-sul*
O-hair-blond
'blond-haired male'
- 7 (b) *ve-vul-sul*
FEM-hair-blond
'blond-haired female'
- 8 (a) *balo-kole*
O-leg-crooked
'male with a deformed leg'
- 8 (b) *ve-balo-kole*
FEM-leg-crooked
'girl with a deformed leg'

It is important to note that when questioning relationships, or addressing or referring to family members or siblings, or giving a description, it is the gender of the person referred to, not that of the addresser that is stressed.

In some languages, some kin terms have no gender marking per se. In Lenakel, according to Lynch (2001), *norh-k* is ‘my younger sibling of same sex as speaker’: thus my younger sister if I am female, and my younger brother if I am male. This is a common pattern in Oceanic. However, there are factors in the patterns in the languages described in this paper that do not follow this common pattern in Oceanic. Firstly, these terms have slightly changed their meaning, so *tasi* means simply ‘young sibling’ (sex unspecified), and secondly, prefixes determine sex: *O*=male, *ve*=female.

Table 1: Morphological marking of gender in names, kin terms, and relationships in Tangoa and Araki.

Name/ kin terms	Tangoa	Araki	Morphological marking (affixes)
traditional male names	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>
traditional female names	<i>ve-</i>	<i>ve-</i>	<i>ve-</i>
son	<i>natu</i>	<i>naru</i>	<i>o</i>
daughter	<i>ve-natu</i>	<i>ve-naru</i>	<i>ve-</i>
grand-son	<i>mahabi</i>	<i>tapu</i>	<i>o</i>
grand-daughter	<i>ve-mahabi</i>	<i>ve-tapu</i>	<i>ve-</i>
father/son-in-law	<i>paliha</i>	<i>paliha</i>	<i>o</i>
mother-in-law	<i>ve-paliha</i>	<i>ve-paliha</i>	<i>ve-</i>
nephew	<i>mata</i>	<i>maru</i>	<i>o</i>
niece	<i>ve-mata</i>	<i>ve-maru</i>	<i>ve-</i>
brother in-law	<i>tahu</i>	<i>rahu</i>	<i>o</i>
sister in-law	<i>ve-tahu</i>	<i>ve-rahu</i>	<i>ve-</i>
grandfather	<i>tapu</i>	<i>tapu</i>	<i>o</i>
grandmother	<i>ve-tapu</i>	<i>ve-tapu</i>	<i>ve-</i>
asking how one is related to a male	<i>sava</i>	<i>sava</i>	<i>o</i>
asking how one is related to a female	<i>ve-sava</i>	<i>ve-sava</i>	<i>ve-</i>
younger male sibling	<i>tasi</i>	<i>rasi</i>	<i>o</i>
younger female sibling	<i>ve-tasi</i>	<i>ve-rasi</i>	<i>ve-</i>
older male sibling	<i>tavai</i>	<i>roha</i>	<i>o</i>
older female sibling	<i>ve-tavai</i>	<i>ve-roha</i>	<i>ve</i>

Gender Marking in some other Vanuatu Languages

In some parts of Vanuatu, traditional personal names and nouns with human reference morphologically mark gender through the process of affixation, particularly through the process of prefixation, rather than suffixation.

Similar gender markings on other Oceanic languages in Vanuatu have been noted by Lynch (2001:232). In his paper on articles, he documented certain examples of female prefixation in some parts of Vanuatu. He noted the prefix *pi-* as a feminine marker appearing in some Tannese languages in southern Vanuatu, while *ve-* was documented to play the same role in Araki as do *ve-* and *voi-* in Kiai and *vo-* in Tamambo, all within Santo on the northern part of Vanuatu. Lynch (1996:71) also noted the feminine prefix *le-* documented by Early (1994) in Lewo on Epi, while the prefix *ri-* in Kwamera and Anejom in the southern part of Vanuatu has a similar role which is restricted to the word for 'mother'.

In the area of South and South-west Santo, the prefix *ve-* indicates traditional feminine names; there is no corresponding marking on traditional masculine names. Other prefixes indicating traditional feminine names in Vanuatu include *kwe-* on West Ambae, and *matan-*, and *mabon-* in Apma. Since Pentecost society is classified into two exogamous moieties, the feminine prefixes *matan-* and *mabon-* have the same role as the masculine *tabi-* and *bule-* in classifying the females into the two exogamous moieties on Central Pentecost.

On the northern part of Pentecost where Raga is spoken *mo-*, *mwe-* and *mu-* are not three allomorphs, but three separate morphemes indicating feminine. *Mwe* is a term of endearment used by parents to refer to a daughter, just as *tari* or *mala* is used with a son. However, *mwe-* is also a prefix on names acquired through the female grade taking ceremony. Like the male grade-taking ceremony through which the males

ascended the chiefly ranks, females also ascend the female chiefly ranks through grade-taking ceremonies. These feminine prefixes in Raga are also applied to nouns which are not personal names. For example, the main posts within the *gamali* ‘meeting house’ or ‘men’s club house’ are given feminine traditional names such as *mu-liu*, *mu-savi*, *mu-rongo* and *mu-gita*, illustrating two important points from a semantic and historical perspective. Semantically, it defines the positions of the posts in relation to the movement and the activities of the people within the men’s club house, as illustrated in these three examples. For *mu-liu*, the post on entrance to the men’s club house, *mu-* is the feminine prefix, while *-liu* ‘beyond’ means that one has to go beyond this post to enter into the *gamali*. For *mu-rongo*, the post in the centre of the meeting house, *mu-* is the feminine prefix, while *-rongo* ‘hear’ means that the post is located where all the discussions take place and within hearing reach. For the *mu-gita* post, *mu-* is the feminine prefix and *-gita* ‘see’ which means that the post is located far from where all the main activities take place, but has an overview or can see everything that takes place in the public meeting house. From the historical perspective, the feminine names given to the posts illustrate the fact that women were originally involved in chiefly roles.

In Epi, the Shepherds and Efate, the prefixes *lei-* and *tou-* are common in female traditional names. Although in some parts of Vanuatu, like most parts of South and South-west Santo, male traditional names are marked with a zero morpheme, others have a special marking to indicate the male gender. In Central Pentecost, *tabi-* and *bule-* are two common prefixes to names, indicating masculinity as well as classifying a person into one of the two moieties, while *tari-* and *mala-* are common prefixes to masculine traditional names on North Pentecost. Within the Shepherds and on Efate, the common prefixes to male traditional names are either *kal-* or *kalo-*, while on East

Ambae it could either be *tari-*, *garae-*, *bani-*, and even *vire-*. On East Ambae, these traditional names can either occur alone or as prefixes to other names.

Morphologically speaking, the examples given above indicate that gender is marked by affixations mostly through prefixation, and rarely by suffixation.

Morphological marking of plants in Tangoa and Araki

In some Vanuatu languages, morphological marking is not restricted to gender distinctions, but also includes the marking of other noun classes, such as plants.

In Tangoa and Araki the prefix *vi-* occurs in the names of most plants as shown in Table 2. This prefix was documented earlier for most plant names in Araki by François (2002: 50 & 311), while Jauncey (1997: 129) noted the prefix *vu-* as playing the same role in Tamambo as in *vu-mbue* ‘bamboo’, *vu-niu* ‘coconut palm’, *vu-mambue* ‘chestnut tree’. Jauncey further noted that *vu-*prefixation in plant names could have derived from Proto Oceanic etymology, POc **puqu* ‘stump/trunk’. Front vowels are used in the prefixes of traditional names (*ve-*) and plants (*vi-*), in Tangoa and Araki, while back vowels (*vo-*) and (*vu-*) play these roles in the Tamambo language. According to Codrington (1896:91), the prefix *mo-* in Mota in the northern part of Vanuatu refers to a clump, grove or patch of trees and is used only on names of trees: for example *mo-mol* ‘grove-orange’. Similar prefix marking for plants have been noted in Bislama, the Melanesian Pidgin dialect with an English-based lexifier, spoken in Vanuatu (Crowley, 1995). Most of the names of trees in Bislama are taken from local languages with the prefix *na-* such as *namambe* ‘Tahitian chestnut’, *navele* ‘bush nut;barringtonia’, *natavoa* ‘tropical almond’, *nangae* ‘canarium nut’; *naus* ‘great hog plum’, *namele* ‘cycad’, *nabanga* ‘banyan’, *nambakura* ‘tamanu’,

namariu ‘wattle, barrel tree’, *namatala* ‘puzzle tree’, *natanggura* ‘sago plam’ and many more.

Similar noun class marking can be observed in the Kilivila language, genetically an Austronesian language of Papua New Guinea. According to Sent (1991:133), when speakers of Kilivila refer to canoe, they would have to indicate the noun class of canoe with the classificatory particles for wooden things with the infix *-ke-* in the interrogative pronoun, in the numeral, in the demonstrative pronoun and even in the adjectives.

Although Tangoa and Araki are closely related languages, their words for *tree trunk* differ. Both languages refer to *tree trunk* by means of metaphor derived from a body part, but Tangoa refers to tree trunk as ‘bottom; buttock’(9), and Araki refers to it as ‘head’ (10), as does Raga (11).

(9) Tangoa	(10) Araki	(11) Raga
<i>blo-tavoa</i>	<i>paru- ja</i>	<i>bwatu-n aranis</i>
bottom- <i>Terminalia catappa</i>	head- <i>Pometia pinnata</i>	head-CST orange
‘Sea almond trunk’	‘Native lychee trunk’	‘Orange trunk’

In Tangoa one can refer to a tree using the prefix *vi-* or *blo-* as shown in (12) - (14).

(12) <i>vi-sava?</i>	(13) <i>blo-sava</i>	(14) <i>blo-rau matea</i>
plant-what	trunk-what	trunk-native lychee ART
‘What tree?’	‘What tree trunk?’	‘A native lychee tree/trunk’

Again, *vi-* (like *ve-*) can be added to non-tree names where appropriate, like *sava* ‘what’ and *ruvu* ‘grass’ as in (15)-(17) and absolute location nouns in Tangoa, as in (18)-(19) which comprise the morphemes *vi-* ‘plant’, *na-* ‘at the place of’ and the name of the plant, illustrating the fact that the village is located at the place of the named plant.

siho ‘kingfisher, *kada* ‘flyingfox, and *civi* ‘rainbow lorikeet, coconut lory.’ Similar prefix marking for birds has been noted in Bislama (Crowley, 1995). Like the prefix *na-* for plants in Bislama, this prefix *na-* is also used for some birds in Bislama, examples of which include: *namalao* ‘incubator bird’, *nasiko* ‘white-collard kingfisher’, *nasiviru* ‘rainbow lorry, rainbow lorikeet’, *napiru* ‘purple swampphen’; *nataroa* ‘white-throated pigeon, metallic wood pigeon’ *nawimba* ‘Pacific pigeon, Pacific imperial pigeon’.

Table 3: Names of birds beginning with *va-* in Tangoa and Araki

Araki <i>va-</i> + bird	Tangoa <i>va-</i> + bird	Gloss	Scientific Identification
<i>vapune</i>	<i>vapune</i>	Red-bellied Fruit Dove	<i>Ptilinopus greyii</i>
<i>vakarakara</i>	<i>vakarakara</i>	Swiflet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>
<i>vakalao</i>	<i>vakalao</i>	Melanesian Cuckooshrike	<i>Coacina caledonica</i>
<i>valalaha</i>	<i>valalaha</i>	White-eye	<i>Zosterops flavifrons</i>
<i>vasarkele</i>	<i>vasarkele</i>	Grey collared Fantail	<i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>
	<i>vasohi</i>	Long-tailed triller, black and white bird	<i>Lalage ieucopyga</i>
<i>vajivjivi</i>	<i>vacivcivi</i>	Cardinal Honeyeater	<i>Myzomela cardinalis</i>

Summary

In summation, prefix is the most common means of marking traditional personal names for female gender in several languages of northern and central Vanuatu and in some languages like in Araki and Tango, this gender marking also encompasses family relationships, description of character and physical appearance. In Raga, female gender marking extends beyond traditional personal names to the names of the posts within the *gamali*, ‘meeting house’. Furthermore, noun-class marking for names of plants and some birds also occurs in Araki, Tangoa and Tamambo, morphologically in the form of prefix.

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