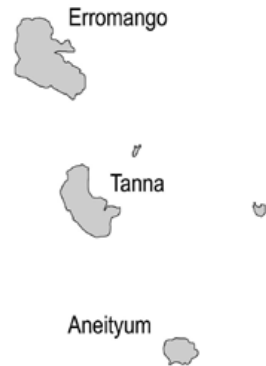
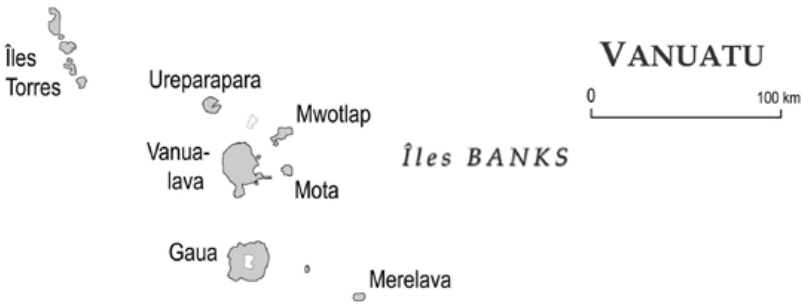


The elusive syntactic definition of article in North Vanuatu languages

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Vanuatu



- South Pacific, north-east of Australia
- around 135 languages
- Austronesian > Oceanic

Articles in Vanuatu

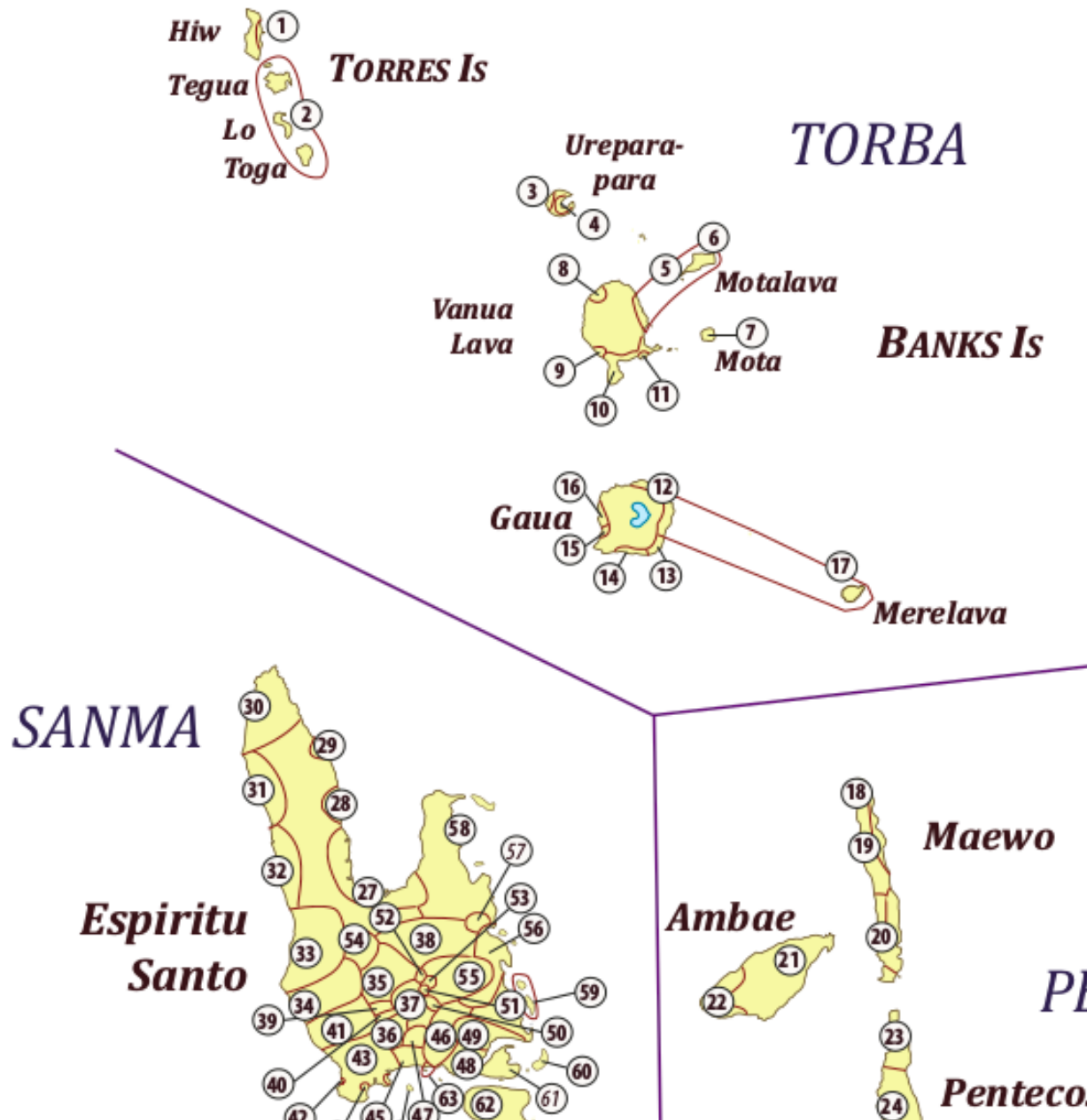
Proto-Oceanic (Lynch 2001) had mainly :

- an article **a/ *na* for common nouns
- an article **i/ *e* for personal nouns (different part of speech)

in **Vanuatu** :

- many languages have lost the **a/na* article
- some languages have retained it partially
(for sub-categories of nouns)
- North-Vanuatu languages have mostly retained it, productively,
for the whole noun category

North-Vanuatu languages



- Torres-Banks
17 languages
- Maewo, Ambae
3 languages
- North-Santo
1 language

North-Vanuatu languages (2)

- strictly accusative languages
- SVO languages
- non-verbal predication usually doesn't involve a copula
- article is usually a reflex of **na* (and sometimes **a*)
- article before the noun

Languages of Maewo and Ambae

- Lolovoli (Ambae, Hyslop 2001) :

subject NPs	object NPs	oblique NPs	predicate NPs
$a \rightarrow \emptyset$	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>	$a \rightarrow \emptyset$

- Sungwadia (Maewo, Henri 2011)

	subject NPs	object NPs	oblique NPs	predicate NPs
sg	a / \emptyset	<i>na=</i>	$(n?)a=$	$a=$ (equative) \emptyset
pl	<i>irana=</i>	<i>na=</i>	<i>na=</i>	<i>irana=</i>

Sungwadia: the object article

- obligatory, no number distinction,
- “referential” article (Becker forth.):

(1) *I= ti= ete na= masu ani osooso lata mo rowo sae*
S3sg Aor 3sg Art big thing dark large Rel run up
“He saw a very big dark thing, that run away”

(2) *Gida= ti= va-tura na= pos kea-ga!*
S1plincl Aor1plincl Caus-stand Art post Dem-Prox
“Let’s stand this post up!”

(3) *I= ti= saro-ra na= tatua be gani-ra*
S3sg Aor look.for-O3pl Art= man Purp manger-O3pl
“He was looking for men to eat”

Sungwadia: the oblique article

- obligatory for definite, specific

(4) *Nik= gilea vevevsale gin (n)a= kad kea ?*
S2sg know Red.play Instr Art cards Dem
“Do you know how to play with this sort of cards?”

(5) *Nau= gilea gin (n)a= masqala tewa laksugo*
S1sg know Instr Art place one down.there
“I know a place down there.”

- optional for non specific

(6) *ira= ge= gangani gin (a=) bute,...*
S3pl AorPl RedDetrans.eat Instr Art= bamboo
“They ate from inside a bamboo/ bamboos.”

(7) *Tueta ira= tai-a gin gari.*
Long.time S3pl cut-03pl Instr shell
“Before, they used to cut-it with a shell/shells”

Sungwadia: the article in predicative NPS

- optional for nominal predication (= non referential)

(8) *tatua kea-la a= tamate*
man Dem-Anaph Art= demon
"This man is a demon"

(9) *Nickolson tatua mermero.*
Nickolson man Red.angry
"Nickolson is a angry man, he gets angry easily."

- obligatory for equative constructions (= referential)

(10) *Tigai, wa= tigai, a= wiriu*
No if no Art dog
"Well, if not, then it was a dog"

Sungwadia: the subject article (sg)

- used ONLY when the noun isn't determined by anything else (demonstrative, possessive, numeral, relative clause) :

(11) *tainwa kea-la toga Tanoriki*
woman Dem-Anaph stay Topon
"This woman lived in Tanoriki."

(12) *No-k veve masagita*
PossClass-P1sg mother be.sick
"My mother is sick."

(13) *A= ani ala le= varea*
Art thing Exist Loc village
"There's something outside"

Sungwadia: the subject article (pl)

- Plural article is obligatory for subject NPs

(14) *Irana= taiŋwa vile na= damu*
ArtPl woman pick.up Art yam
"Women used to pick up the yams, ..."

(15) *Irana= ŋwera kea wiwia,*
ArtPl children Dem Red.good
"These children were really beautiful"

Referent types for each function

	subject	object	oblique	predicate
definite	/ <i>irana=</i>	<i>na=</i> (sg and pl)	<i>a=</i> (sg and pl)	<i>a=</i>
specific	<i>a=</i> or \emptyset <i>irana=</i>	<i>na=</i> (sg and pl)	<i>a=</i> (sg and pl)	?
non specific	<i>a=</i> <i>irana=</i>	<i>na=</i> (sg and pl)	<i>a</i> or \emptyset (sg and pl?)	?

Na and a

- Are these exponents of the same article?
- hypothesis: *n-* is a case marker
- But:

(16) *ia kea na= tuagae dodomgoro suri-a kea na= tasi.*
I3sg Dem Art elder.child jalouser suivre-O3sg Dem Art younger.child
“The elder sister was jealous of the younger sister.”

(17) *Kami na= tatua dat le= marama*
I1plex Art man| Orig Loc world
“We, the men of the world”

+ Plural article form “*irana*”

→ “external sandhi”?

Let's take a look at languages further north

- 17 languages of Torres and Banks (François 2006) and Sakao (Espiritu Santo, Touati 2014)
- almost always reflexes of **na*
 - exception: Oirat (no article)
 - exceptions: 6 languages that specialized the *nV* article for possessive constructions and created a new form (structurally equivalent as *nV* elsewhere)
 - sakao (north Santo) has an alternance between a vowel copy (reflex of **a*) and *n-* (reflex of **na*) depending on the first sound of the noun (respectively consonant or vowel)
- “well-behaved” articles (ex. from mwerlap)

Articles in Torres-Banks and Sakao)

languages	article
Hiu	nə
Lo-Toga	nə
Lehali	n-
Lehalurup	n(V)-
Volow	n(V)-
Mwotlap	nV-
Lermerig	n-
Vera'a	(I)n
Olrat	∅

languages	article
Vurës	na ɔ
Mwesen	ɔ
Mota	na o
Nume	na- u
Doriug	na ɔ
Koro	na ɔ
Lakon	(I)n
Mwerlap	nV-
Sakao	V- / n-

Nouns without an article

- when non referential

(18) *i si sa-kal nʊ- bʊtʊ?*
PersArt who Irr-climb Art-breadfruit.tree
"Who is going to climb the breadfruit tree?"

(19) *sɛan nu kal bʊtʊ lɪ*
S3sg Impft climb breadfruit.tree be.able
"She's able to climb breadfruit trees!"

- after some prepositions

(20) *sɛan ti kʊr nɛn alʊ,*
S3Sg AorSg dry Prep sun
"It dried in the sun"

Nouns without an article

- Head modifier

(21) *nʊ nu lɛaɥ ɥɔm lɛ- mɔθtʊp vɛrɪ.*
S1sg Impft get.married only Loc way island
“I just got married in the traditional way”

(22) *i pupu ɲwarat/ vavɛan*
PersArt grand.parent man woman
“Grand-father / Grand-mother”

Nouns need an article to...

- be head of an actancial or predicative NP

(23) *nə-dəmea wɔk sɔksɔk sur-ɪa*
Art- thought work a.lot towards-O3sg
“I was thinking hard about it”

(24) *lan na-natʊ-n nu bɪn tuwɛl.*
Bckgd Art- enfant-P3sg Impft Exist one
“But now, she has a child”

(25) *nʊ nu mɔβrəs luwluw min na-vavɛan winwin kɪkɪ kan*
S1sg Impft want tell.story Dat Art-woman white Red-Dx1 Dx2
“I want to tell a story to this white woman here.”

(26) *kɛl kan nu-luwluw tɛ bɛ lɛaɰlɛaɰ ta lɛ mɔβtʊp vɛrɪ*
Deix Dem Art-story Abl Purp wedding Abl Loc way island
“That was the story of customary marriage”

Compatibilities

- compatible with demonstratives, numerals, possessive structures (can be omitted in the last one)...

(27) *i luŋwɪr mata sɛau nɔ-mɔβn irʊ kan*
PersArt child see up Art-bird two Dem
“The child saw these two birds...”

(28) *(nu-) mu-mɛm kastɔm*
(Art-) PossClass-P1plexcl custom
“Our custom”

Referent types

- They all seem to be « referential articles » (Becker (forth.)) :

(29) *uɔr nɛ-mɛttam !*

shut Art-door

“Shut the door!”

(30) *nɔ̃ su ssur nu-luwluw tuwɛl.*

S1sg Irr tell Art-story one

“I will tell one story”

(31) *nɔ̃-nɔ̃m bɪn*

Art-mosquito Exist

“There are mosquitoes”

“Transferring” and referentiality

- François (2006) says:
 - “ the article is required whenever the noun is syntactically the head of an autonomous constituent, whether a verb's argument, a noun predicate, etc. Semantically, the function of this article consists in embodying the noun's quality into a discrete, specific referent (...) Common-noun articles may be described as a device used to transform qualifying noun phrases (...) into referential noun phrases.”
- cf. the concept of “translation” by Tesnière.
- the article allows the noun to access functions it couldn't access by itself.

But even in Torres and Banks languages...

- ... some languages are not perfectly consistent in this pattern.
- 5 languages seem to optionally drop the article (François 2006). Mwerlap does it for subjects:

(32) *na-tan nu van, tan nu rip nε-mεtsal, tan van silεu*
Art-ground Impft go ground Impft pull Art-road ground go Dir.down
"The ground went away, it pulled the road away, the ground went down"

Generalisation

- for Torres-Banks languages, Sakao, and Maewo/Ambae languages (except for singular subject), the article is:
- semantically a referentialiser, that transfers nouns from quality entities to referential entities
- syntactically a “translateur” (transferring device) that allows the nouns to be the head of a NP

What about subject articles?

- Subjects article for Sungwadia, Lolovoli and five northern languages show “aberrant” behaviour.
 - The subject article is the first one to decline because of semantic reasons.
- For subjects in Maewo and Ambae languages at least, nouns still have to go through referentialisation and syntactic “transfer”, but other determiners are enough to do that, and they’re more informative, semantically.
- Subjects have to be topics, they’re usually high on the animacy scale, [+] control, etc..
- they need to be referential and identified as such
- and more to the point, the hearer needs to know quite precisely about the referent type.

What about subjects articles?

There is a pragmatic pressure to express clearly the referent type

but the article is semantically pretty vague ("referential" articles)

possibility of adding precisions (more determiners)

→ EITHER determiners are added

→ article won't bring anything more

to the table, it's not useful, drop it

→ OR determiners are not added

→ then the article is needed to

at least referentialize the noun

Conclusions

- Is it possible to propose a unique syntactic definition for articles in North Vanuatu
 - mitigated answer
 - transfer + referentialisation (expected..)
 - not much!
- good example of why it's difficult to give a crosslinguistic description/definition of articles: too many interferences (pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, even morpho-phonological)
- also a good example of conflicting pressures on articles

Conclusions

- But what's interesting here is that
 - in more than half the languages, and historically probably, the transfer was operated at the level of articles. Other categories were just modifiers, operating on a semantic level.
 - in a few languages, we can the transferring operation being shifted to determiners as a class (previously not relevant). And in the same time, article have started to show different referent types for different functions. They loose ground on syntactic level, but they're gaining semantic weight.

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**Veren nu lap!
Wiwia min kamu!**