

Aberrant features of the languages of Vanuatu

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All of the 120 or so indigenous languages spoken in Vanuatu belong to the Oceanic subgroup of the Austronesian language family; the vast majority are part of the Southern Oceanic subgroup.

In this talk, I will first present a number of aberrant features of the languages of Vanuatu. These include phonetic rarities (e.g. bilabial trills, linguolabials, labial-velars), phonological features (e.g. lack of /p/ and /c/), numerals (e.g. quinary systems), some types of complex predicates, and clause chaining constructions (e.g. echo-reference constructions and sequential constructions).

I will place the discussion of these features in two contexts. Firstly, I will demonstrate how such aberrant features can play an important role in identity attachment and participate in processes of language divergence and convergence. These are important questions considering the extreme intra-clade diversity at hand.

Secondly, as part of an attempt to account for the emergence of these aberrant features, I will focus on the available evidence regarding contact with non-Austronesian (Papuan) languages as a factor.