A descriptive grammar of Merei (Vanuatu)

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A descriptive grammar of Merei (Vanuatu)

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Preface

This book is a description of the grammar of the Merei language of central Espiritu Santo Island of Vanuatu, South Pacific. Its purpose is to describe the Merei language of Vanuatu (New Hebrides), South Pacific. It starts with a brief description of phonemes, phonotactics, orthography and morphophonemics. The main components then follow the logical sequence of noun phrases, verb phrases, clauses, and sentences. Each part starts with simple default or unmarked patterns followed by the modified or more complex features.

The work is based on a structural and data oriented approach using data collected within the Merei-speaking community in Vanuatu between 1995 to 1997. It begins with background on the language and a brief phonological description. The description of syntax starts with phrase structures and their constituents. Clause structure, sentences types and more complex structures are built in a bottom-up approach based on the phrase structures. The Oceanic features of this language are highlighted through a comparison with other Austronesian languages and Proto Oceanic. Hopefully this description will provide more clues for the puzzles of the study of Oceanic languages.

Abbreviations and conventions

Abbreviation	Meaning	Section
#	word boundary	§2.4
??	unknown	Table 10
1	1st person singular	§3.1
1D	1st person dual inclusive	§3.1
1DE	1st person dual exclusive	§3.1
1E	1st person plural exclusive	§3.1
1I	1st person plural inclusive	§3.1
2	2nd person singular	§3.1
2P	2nd person plural	§3.1
3	3rd person singular	§3.1
3D	3rd person dual	§3.1
3P	3rd person plural	§3.1
A:C	article of common noun	§2.4
A:NF	non-referential article	§2.4
A:P	article of personal noun	§2.4
BEN	benefactive	§5.3.1
DAT	dative	§5.3.1
FUR	futuristic	§5.4.2
GEN.E	genitive for edible	§3.7.2
GEN.I	genitive for inedible	§3.7.2
HOR	hortative	§6.1
IMP.INTR	aspect: intransitive imperfective	§4.2.5
IMP.TR	aspect: transitive imperfective	§4.2.5
IPT	imperative	§6.1
IRR	modality: irrealis in third person	§4.2.2
L/T	locative/temporal preposition	§5.3.1
NEG	negative	§4.2.2
Ø	zero morpheme	§4.2.1, §4.2.4
OD	outwards directional clitics	§5.4.1
PAN	Proto Austronesian language	§3
PERF.INTR	aspect: intransitive perfective	§4.2.5
PERF.TR	aspect: transitive perfective	§4.2.5

Abbreviation	Meaning	Section
POc	Proto Oceanic language	§1.5
POSSC.E	direct possessive classifier of edible noun	§3.7.2
POSSC.I	direct possessive classifier of inedible noun	§3.7.2
PROHIB	prohibition	§6.1
PSP	modality: presupposition	§4.2.2
R	modality: realis	§4.2.2
RED	reduplication	§3.4
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics	§1.4
TD	towards directional clitics	§5.4.1

Vernacular forms are printed in *italics*. Phonetic notations are in the International Phonetic Alphabet in DoulosIPA font and are enclosed in square brackets, [ ]. The full stop '.' between the italic characters or phonetic symbols marks a syllable break. The '/' in the examples represents a phonological pause. The meaning of the vernacular forms are marked shown in regular form inside the single quotation marks, ' '. The protolanguage phonemes are marked by a preceding '*' before the italic segment. The ill-formed examples are marked by a preceding '*' before the examples.

1 *Introduction*

This work is mainly based on language data I collected among the Merei-speaking people in Navele village in Espiritu Santo Island of Vanuatu, where I lived and learned the Merei language from May 1995 until March 1997. The data was based on elicitation in the field, and no further data was available to verify or countercheck the hypotheses during the writing of this work. Interference through introspection based on my limited competence of Merei seemed inevitable.

The Merei language has not previously been described and the languages of the Espiritu Santo inland have been a missing link for the whole picture of the languages of Vanuatu. In addition, the lack of data on Oceanic languages hinders the precise classification of the languages of Northern Central Vanuatu, which are Remote Oceanic (Ross 1994, pers. comm.; Early 1994:39–41; Tryon 1973:303). Thus it is hoped that this description of Merei might contribute to the comparative study of the languages of Vanuatu as well as of Oceanic languages in general. In order to facilitate such comparison, the outline is mainly based on the framework of the 'Typological Overview' in Chapter 3 of Lynch, Ross and Crowley's (2002) book, *The Oceanic languages*.

1.1 Typological features of Merei

Merei is an SVO language with many typical Oceanic features (Pawley & Reid 1980:116–117). Possessives are divided into direct (or inalienable) and indirect (or alienable). Subject pronouns, modality and aspect markers occur preverbally, and object pronouns and aspect adverbs follow the verb. Serial verb constructions are frequent.

The morphological structure is relatively simple and somewhat between fusional and agglutinative, with a few inflectional and derivational affixes. Bi-morphemic nouns are common. The case marking system is nominative-accusative, with case marked by word order alone. Headmarking is rigid. The adpositions are prepositions.
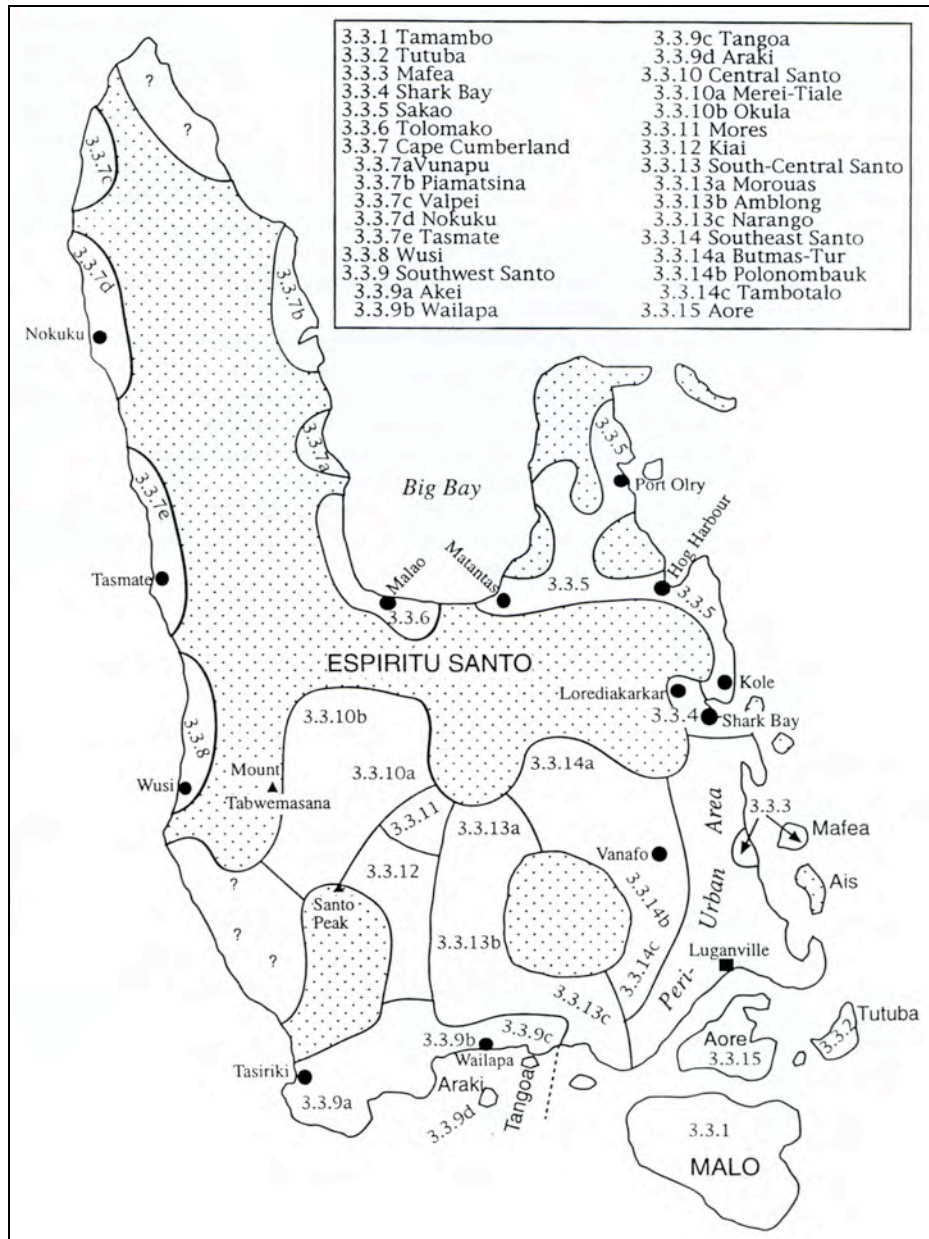
Map 1: Merei and other languages of Espiritu Santo.
Based on Lynch and Crowley (2001:45).

1.2 Demographic information

Merei used to be classified as one of the twenty-nine languages on Espiritu Santo, the largest island of Vanuatu, with about four thousand square kilometres. Most of the language groups have fewer than a thousand speakers (Wurm 1994:135). In 1996 a linguistic survey shows that Merei is spoken as a mother tongue by approximately four hundred people in at least four villages, Angoru, Navele, Tombet and Vusvogo between the Ora and Lape rivers in

the central area of Espiritu Santo island (Stahl 1996). Recently Merei and its related language, Tiale, are considered the same language as Merei–Tiale under the category of Central Santo languages. The population of the Merei–Tiale speakers has been estimated around eight hundred (Lynch & Crowley 2001:54).

The Merei language is not commonly discussed in the literature. It is considered to be the same as Lametin as described by Tryon (1976) based on a comparison of 234 words, among which 94.87 per cent cognates have been found (see Appendix 3). Tryon (1976) uses Lametin as the name for Merei and says it had 150 speakers. Lynch (1996) gives Naluttsileri as another name for the Lametin language. According to people from the Big Bay area and a map of Espiritu Santo (Topographical Service of the Government of the New Hebrides 1979), Lametin refers to a specific village near the Tombet village in the high land south of Bengie and south-west of Ora river that was abandoned in the 1960s. Two Merei-speaking women, who are currently living in Navele village, had been living in Lametin village around the 1960s. Thus, we may consider that Merei was Lametin. The name of Lametin has also been used as the name of the Merei language in some other linguistic literature (Gordon, R.G. Jr. 2005; Wurm 1994; Tryon 1994). However, the location of the villages can be confused as the village can be abandoned after the death of the chief (Lynch & Crowley 2001:53). The name Merei, which means 'no', is what indigenous speakers use to refer to their language. Another reference to the name Merei was by the anthropologist Thomas Ludvigson (1981:67).

All the inhabitants of the Merei-speaking villages except my family are Melanesians. Some inhabitants are non-Merei speakers, including families of the clergy of the Melanesian Mission, the health workers, teachers and some boarding students in Navele school, the only primary school in the interior of Espiritu Santo island. The teaching medium in school is English, and so some Merei-speaking children who have attended school speak a little English. The government is considering having vernacular education in kindergarten.

Merei speakers seldom had contact with the town until a new road was built in 1993. They had not had much contact with the people beyond the interior of Espiritu Santo until the arrival of Melanesian missionaries in the 1970s. These foreign clergy are mainly from the Northern part of Vanuatu (New Hebrides). Most of the adults are bilingual in Bislama and their mother tongue to different degrees, but a few who went to school understand some English. Bislama is used in the domains of the church and community clinic and as the lingua franca with other language groups. Most of the adults in the village are preliterate. There was no literature in Merei until we produced some Bible story booklets in 1996.

Jim Stahl, a linguistic survey specialist, and I collected word lists of Merei and a few neighbouring languages, Tiale, Kiai, Toksigi, Okula and Akei. (All these language names are quite different from those mentioned in Tryon's *New Hebrides languages: an internal classification*.) Merei is closely related to Tiale, which is spoken by around seven hundred people living west of the Ora River, from the Big Bay area to Mataipevu village in Southwest Espiritu Santo. According to a comparison of 250-item word lists based on Tryon (1976:172–174, cf. Appendix 3), Merei and Tiale are 90–93 per cent similar. The rest of the neighbouring languages are 62 per cent or less similar to Tiale and Merei. Recorded text tests have been carried out in Merei and Tiale and have shown that the two languages are mutually intelligible. Thus they might be considered varieties of one language (Stahl 1996). R.G. Gordon, Jr. (2005) also mentions Winiv as a dialect of Lametin. Strangely it is also listed as a dialect of Vinmavis, which belongs to the sub-classification of Malekula interior, but the Winiv language has not been found mentioned in any other document.
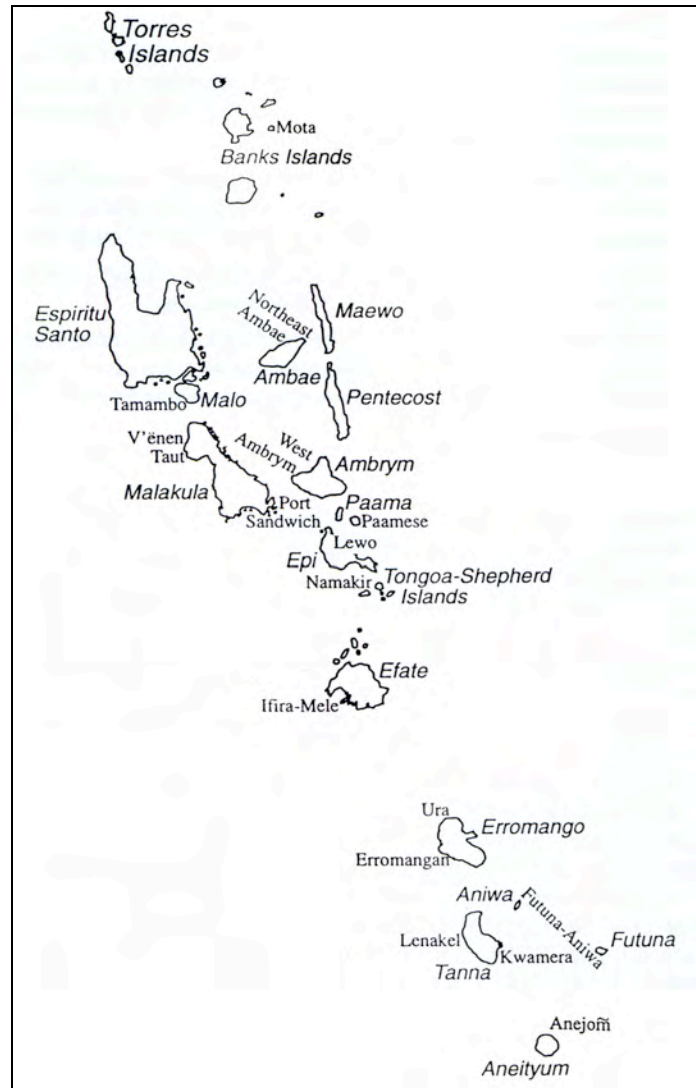
Map 2: Some other Northern Central Vanuatu languages.
Based on Lynch and Crowley (2001:16).

1.3 Early sources

Not much literature on the grammars of Merei, Tiale and other closely related languages of Santo inland has been found. However, word lists of the Santo inland languages have been collected (Tryon 1976). Clark's (1985) work, which provides more information on the interrelationship between the North and Central Vanuatu languages, was cited under many different Santo languages in Lynch and Crowley's *Languages of Vanuatu* (2001).

Some of the earliest grammar descriptions or word lists of the neighbouring languages can be found in Ray's (1926) *A comparative study of the Melanesian Islands languages*. However, it is very difficult to distinguish the languages and verify that those mentioned in this article are the same as languages spoken today. According to a few lists of ten words, Merei seems to be similar at a rate of two out of three to what was named 'Inland language',

but the words of the Inland language are found 'mutilated almost beyond recognition' (Ray 1926:350). Merei is 40 per cent to 50 per cent similar to the languages of Tasiriki, Tangoa, Bay 2 and Nogugu (Ray 1926:350–351). The Nogugu language of the West Coast was learnt by European missionaries in 1869, and a sketch of grammar was printed in 1889 (Gordon 1889; Ray 1926:348–349).

The language of Mota Island of Northern Vanuatu was described in the last century (Codrington 1877). It was widely used as a common language (lingua franca) in education and in religious domains in northern Vanuatu and the eastern Solomons from the middle of the nineteenth century until 1931 (Wurm 1994:94). The Sakau language of the East Coast of Santo was also described (Guy 1974), but it is very different from its neighbours (Wurm 1994:135; Ray 1926:350). Annand (1891) described the grammar in South Santo in the last century. Camden has worked with the Tangoa language, and hymns in the Tangoa language have been produced and published. Jeff Batcock (pers. comm.) is working with the grammar and a dictionary of the language. Dorothy Jauncey (1996) is working with another language, named Malo, from the name of the island south of Espiritu Santo. Some other descriptions of other languages in Northern Central Vanuatu subgroup, including Raga, Paamese, Lewo, and Port Sandwich, are collected in Tryon's (1994–95) *Comparative Austronesian dictionary*. A more complete bibliography of Vanuatu languages has been done by Lynch and Crowley (2001).

1.4 Sources of data

In 1995 my wife and I arrived in Vanuatu and worked as translation advisers with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) under the auspices of the Translation and Literacy Program of the Vanuatu Christian Council, which is under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Vanuatu Government. We started learning the Vanuatu national language, Bislama, after our arrival in February. In May 1995 we were allocated to a Merei-speaking village, Navele, inland on Espiritu Santo Island, and started our cultural and language learning. I began by eliciting words and expressions in Merei and a list of 'power tools', expressions of greetings and questions for exploring the language, working with the village people who were bilingual in Bislama and Merei. My language learning is mainly based on an interactive approach, conversing with my neighbours and other members of the community. The references, *Language acquisition made practical* (Brewster & Brewster 1976) and *Language learner's field guide* (Healey 1975) were used as guidelines and for evaluating learning progress.

The Merei words were first recorded in a data notebook, then were keyed into the lexical database of a linguistic data management program, Shoebox V2.0 (Wimbish 1992–93). In July 1995, we started to tape texts of different genres, such as procedural, legend, life story, history, speech and conversation. Some texts were transcribed and keyed in, then the texts were interlinearised by using Shoebox as a means of morphological analysis and source of new lexical items. (An interlinearised sample text of narrative genre is at the end of this work, Appendix 1.) The texts were then imported to the *Fast Interactive Editor of Scripture and Text Analysis* (FIESTA Vers. 4.5t) (Alsop 1987–1992) for searching and analysing the syntax. All the recorded texts are on fourteen tapes (see Appendix 2). Words based on the word list in Tryon's (1976) *New Hebrides Languages* were collected and have been analysed

by using phonological analysis software, Findphone (Vers. 6.0, SIL 1995). All the transcribed data was saved in the hard disk of a laptop computer with backup tapes in Port Vila. At a later stage of my language learning, I also used *Computerised extraction of components of intonation in language for Windows* (WinCECIL Vers. 2.1) (SIL 1994) as a speech analysis tool for learning utterances and imitating intonation. My Merei language proficiency was tested as being at the advanced level in the scale of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL; see SIL 1996, 1997) by the SIL (Vanuatu) personnel coordinator in February 1997.

1.5 Classification

Lametin language belongs to west-Santo subgroup of the North-Central Vanuatu group. The North Central Vanuatu group had been classified as Remote Oceanic of the Eastern Central Oceanic languages (Wurm 1994:135; Tryon 1994 Part I, Fascicle I:22–27) but now people widely accept that North Central Vanuatu should be classified directly under Proto Oceanic (POc) because there is not enough evidence to support the Eastern Oceanic classification (Pawley & Ross 1993:439–440). There is another opinion subgrouping Lametin as South Santo (western) and considering its protolanguage to be Proto Northern Vanuatu based on Clark's data in 1985 and Tryon's work in 1976 (Lynch 1996). There seems to be little literature discussing the genetic affiliation of Lametin.

1.6 Approach to description

Since the objective of the paper is to provide more information for the comparative study of Oceanic languages, the outline of the typological sketch in *The Oceanic languages* (Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002) was adopted with minor modification.

The advantage of this approach is that typical Oceanic features are highlighted and it is easy to compare prominent topics, such as the pronominal system, possessive constructions, serial verbs, and so on. This is especially important for a sketch grammar like this, which can by no means cover all topics in depth. However, any preset framework has a potential danger of obscuring the uniqueness of a particular language to fit it into a generic mould. Thus such a sketch should always be regarded as somewhat tentative and subject to revision. An awareness of the dynamics of language always humbles linguists, who are limited in time and space.

This work uses a 'bottom-up' structural approach starting from phonemes and moving to words and phrases, nominal constituents and predicates of the clause, and clause structures more generally. Relative clauses, which are widely embedded within the noun phrases, are dealt with in connection to nominals instead of clauses and thus are an exception to the 'bottom-up' approach. The next section discusses the sentence types, which are modifications of basic clause structures to produce different speech acts. The discussion of question words under a section about content questions is another exception to the 'bottom-up' approach because those words are difficult to categorise according to their syntactic distribution. A section on complex sentences is a further development from basic clause structure. The conclusion then highlights some of the features of the Merei which may be significant in its classification.

2 *Phonology*

The phonology of Merei is relatively simple, like that of other members of the Oceanic subgroup, being a non-tonal language with most syllables being simply CV syllables. There are contrasts between prenasalised voiced stops and plain oral voiceless stops. Stress falls predicably on penultimate syllable. As in most of the western Oceanic languages (Staley 1996), there is no contrast between short and long vowels in Merei.

2.1 Phonemes

The language has sixteen consonant phonemes and five vowels. The combination of vowels can form nine diphthongs.

Table 1: Consonant phonemes

p	t	k
^{m}b	^{n}d	$^\eta$g
pm	dʒ	
v	s	
m	n	ŋ
	l	
	r	j

Table 2: Vowel phonemes

i		u
e		o
	a	

Table 3: Vowel combinations: diphthongs

	a	e	i	o	u
a		ae	ai	ao	au
e			ei		
i					
o			oi		ou
u		ue	ui		

The contrast between prenasalised stops and regular stops represents a typical feature of the neighbouring languages of this area. All the phonemes seem identical or similar to Proto Austronesian phonemes except the *pm* (Dahl 1976:14, 101). The phoneme */pm/* is rare and it has a regional variation of */pn/* in initial and medial position of a word and *p* in final position. The people from Tombet village tend to pronounce it *pm*.

(1)   [ropm] ~ [rop]   'veranda'
         [pna.pna.na] ~ [pma.pma.na]   'its base'
         [lep.ne] ~ [lep.me]   'female'

2.2 Phonotactics

Words are mainly disyllabic but some are monosyllabic. Words more than three syllables are usually bi-morphemic. Words can begin with any consonant or vowel. The syllable patterns can be described as ((C)C)V(C), i.e. V, CV, CCV, VC, CVC, CCVC. The simple open syllable pattern CV is the most productive.

(2)   V   *a.lo*   'fine weather'
         CV   *ku*   'bark' (of dog)
         CCV   *vla*   'moon'
         VC   *at*   'bite'
         CVC   *jip*   'knife'
         CCVC   *dlang*   'hard'

Nine of the sixteen consonants can occur as the final segment of closed syllables, namely the bilabial and dental voiceless stops *p* and *t*, the nasalised bilabial voiced stop *b*, the sibilant *s*, the bilabial, dental and velar nasals *m*, *n* and *ng*, the lateral *l* and the alveolar flap *r*. Usually the first slot of the consonant cluster can be filled by any non-velar fricative or stop, i.e. *v*, *s*, *p*, *t*, *b*, *d*, and the second slot can be filled by either the lateral *l* or alveolar flap *r*. There are also *lm*, *sn* and *vs* clusters. The initial consonant clusters are suspected to be a vestige of CV[high]C, where the high vowel has been deleted. Tiale speakers tend to pronounce high vowels between the consonants that are in Merei clusters.

(3)   *tlui* (Merei) ~ *tului* (Tiale)   'pull'
         lmana (Merei) ~ *limana* (Tiale)   'his/her hand'
         vsuina (Merei) ~ *vusuina* (Tiale)   'its flower'

There is no contrast between long and short vowels within a morpheme, but identical vowel sequences, which are seem to be realised as lengthened vowels, can be found across morpheme boundaries (see also §2.4, second rule), compare:

(4)   *ta*   *lo*   'black'
         REL   black

         ta   *alo*   'fine weather'
         REL   fine

The syllabification of sequences of different vowels is predictable. If the vowel sequence is high vowel followed by low vowel, it is manifested as two syllables. If the vowel sequence is low vowel followed by high vowel, it is one syllable, and the two vowels are considered to constitute a diphthong, as shown in Table 3.

2.3 Stress

Stress is not contrastive. In two or three syllable words stress falls on the penultimate vowel except when the word final syllable is heavier than the penultimate, i.e. the final syllable has more segments than the previous syllable, in which case stress is on the final syllable; compare:

(5)   *ma'ma.sa*   'good'
         la'rai   'grate'

In words of four or more syllables, secondary stress falls on each alternate syllable to the right of the final stressed syllable, except when the following syllable is heavier.

(6)   *ˌa.buˌa.bu'ka.ra*   'quick'
         maˌnai.la'rai   'pudding'
         maˌtai'ma.sa   'sun'

2.4 Morphophonemics

In Merei the morphophonemic processes observed are as follows:

1.   Reduce CV.CV[high] to CVC by deletion of the final vowel of unstressed syllable before an alveolar consonant, the process take places before the assignment of the stress.

     CV.CV[high]+{C[alveolar]}→CVC.C

     'mali   +   -na   →   'malna   'his house'
     house   3G

     'natu   +   -ra   →   'natra   'their child'
     child   3PL

This rule does not apply if the following consonant is not alveolar. For example:

     'mali   +   -m   →   ma'lim   'your house'
     house   2G

ˈ*natu* + *-gu* → *na*ˈ*tugu*   'my child'
child   1

2.   Reduce V to Ø by vowel deletion if preceded by the same vowel, the process takes place before the assignment of the stress.

$V_1 \# V_1 \rightarrow V_1$

ˈ*sio*   + ˈ*oso*   → *si*ˈ*o so*
descend   arrive   'descended and arrive'

va + ˈ*asi-* → ˈ*va si*
go   DAT   'go to'

ia   *mali* + *i*   *Pita* →   *mal i Pita*
A:C   house   A:P   Peter   'house of Peter'

However, the remaining vowel seems to be lengthened.

2.5 Orthography

The orthography now in use was recently decided and is still somewhat provisional. It is mainly based on Bislama and English. A Bislama literacy program had been run by World Vision for a couple of years from 1999.

The prenasalised stops [^{m}b, ^{n}d, $^{\eta}$g] are written with the letters *b*, *d*, *g*. The voiced alveolar affricate [dʒ] is written with the letter *j*. The velar nasal [ŋ] is written with the digraph *ng*. The free varied flap [ɾ] or trill [r] is written with the letter *r*. The palatal approximal [j] is written with the letter *i*. The vowels are based on Bislama.

3 *Nominals and noun phrases*

Nominals include pronouns and nouns. Their modification and function is discussed below. As noted earlier, a 'bottom-up' approach is adopted. Noun phrases, which can be a combination of all these constituents, are discussed at the end of this chapter.

The chapter starts with the pronominal system, including pronouns and demonstratives, which is significant in typology. The Merei pronominal system has the typical Oceanic features of dual, exclusive and inclusive in first person plural form and no distinction between gender (Staley 1996). Similarities with Proto Austronesian (PAN) and other Austronesian language pronouns are obvious (see e.g. Dyen 1974:19). Demonstrative pronouns are discussed at a later point because they are compounds of third person pronouns and locational adverbs.

Noun classes are another important topic for typological concern. There is a close relationship between noun classes and articles, which have to agree with the noun classes. Number marking and numerals are mentioned before the nominal modifying section, because although they are similar to nominal modifying, they have their own distinctive features and are significant in Oceanic languages. Noun compounding is discussed after the topic of nominal modifying because the difference between nominal modifier and noun classifier is subtle. Following that, another typologically significant feature, the possessive construction, is described in detail. Ultimately, noun phrase structures can be described clearly with every ingredient well defined.

The final two subsections cover more complicated structures. The noun phrases are discussed as the building blocks of complex noun phrases. Relative clauses are also described because they function as nominal arguments within the clause or within noun phrase structures.

3.1 Pronouns

The pronominal system distinguishes among first, second and third persons. Singular, dual and plural are distinguished in number. First person dual and plural distinguishes between inclusive and exclusive. The following table shows not only the independent pronouns, but also preverbal subject pronouns and suffixes that become relevant in later sections.

Table 4: Pronouns and pronominal suffixes

	Independent pronouns	Preverbal subject pronouns	Object pronominal suffix	Possessive pronominal suffix
1	*nao*	*na/nam*	*-iau*	*-gu*
2	*go*	*ko*	*-ko*	*-m*
3	*nie*	Ø	Ø	*-na*
1I	*de*	*te*	*-da*	*-da*
1E	*gamau*	*kama*	*-mau*	*-mau*
2P	*gami*	*kam*	*-mi*	*-mi*
3P	*ire*	Ø	*-ra*	*-ra*
1D	*de rua*	*tera*	*-da rua*	*-da rua*
1DE	*gamau rua*	*kamara*	*-mau rua*	*-mau rua*
2D	*gami rua*	*kamra*	*-mi rua*	*-mi rua*
3D	*ire rua*	Ø	*-ra rua*	*-ra rua*

The pronominal system comprises two free-form categories (independent pronouns and preverbal subject pronouns), and two bound categories (object pronominal suffix and possessive pronominal suffix). The pronominal suffixes are not pronouns, but they are included in the discussion here because of their close relationships to them. There is no gender or animate distinction made, and the pronouns only have animate reference. Independent pronouns are always preceded by a personal article *i,* which is similar to *ni*, the optional emphatic particle of the free pronouns in a Solomon Island language, Toabaita (Simons 1986:24).

Numbers greater than two can be added after the plural pronoun as numeral or quantifier, although it is not very common.

(7)   *Kama sangavul Ø ta ruva Ø ta sioto getua.*
       1E   ten   3 R two 3 R   stay   here
       'We twelve stay here.'

(8)   *Kama morna Ø ta mle.*
       1E   plenty 3 R leave
       'We plenty leave.'

Locational adverbs combining with a third person independent pronoun are used to refer to an inanimate argument with a location referential parameter (see §3.2). The pronominal objects of transitive verbs can be in the form of either an object pronoun suffix within the predicate (cf. §3.1 and §5.2.2) or an independent pronoun. This is also similar to Toabaita (Simons 1986:24–25).

The first person singular subject pronominal clitic has the allomorph *nam* when it is followed by the negative particle, *tei*, or the reality marker, *ta*. The third person singular pronoun *nie* can also function as a particle 'yes' or it can combine with the particle *nga* as 'enough'.

Reflexive pronouns are formed from the root *nese-* with an (inalienable) possessive pronoun suffix. It can be used in apposition with the free pronoun and usually emphasises exclusiveness and is usually followed by the particle *nga* 'only'.

(9)   I   *nau   nese-gu nga nam ta   sioto.*
      A:P   1   self-1   only 1   R   stay
      'Just I myself stay.'

(10) *Nam ta   jip   nese-gu   nga.*
      1   R   cut   self-1   only
      'I cut myself.'

The reciprocal pronoun *marie* can be used to modify the verb of speaking with a plural subject.

(11) *Tato   varavara   marie.*
      R.3P   speak   each.other
      'They speak to each other.'

Some verbs are semantically reciprocal, sometimes derivational (see §4.6).

(12) *vol-uju*   *dom*   *jen-jen*
      buy-sell   fight   change-RED (intransitive)
      'exchange'   'fight'   'exchange'

3.2 Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are combinations of locational adverbs and third person pronouns. They can occupy the whole noun phrase slot and function as an independent nominal argument or they can be at the end of the noun phrase as the modifier of the noun-head (see §3.8). They are significant as a 'pointing and indexing device' in discourse (Greenberg 1986:XVII-XVIII).

Like the locational adverbs, they can be classified into two types according to different aspects of reference: speaker–hearer reference and spatial reference.

The speaker–hearer reference demonstrative pronouns are formed by the third person independent pronouns, *nie* and *ire*, combined with speaker–hearer reference prefixes. Thus:

Table 5: Speaker–hearer reference demonstrative pronouns

	Singular	Plural
close to both speaker and hearer	*get-nie*	*get-ire*
close to the speaker	*na-nie*	*na-ire*
close to the hearer	*gata-nie*	*gata-ire*
uncertain/not visible	*ani-nie*	*ani-ire*

(13) *Get-nie   ia   sava?*
      this   A:C   what
      'What is this?'

(14) *Iadu   tese   get-ire   tato   toma?*
      A:C.PL   man   these   R.3P   what.happen
      'What are these men doing?'

The spatial reference demonstrative pronouns are formed by the third person independent pronouns, *nie* and *ire*, combined with spatial adverbial adverbs. Thus:

Table 6: Spatial reference demonstrative pronouns

		Proximal	Intermediate	Distal
ascending direction	singular	*ai-sa-nie*	*ma-ja-nie*	*le-sa-nie*
	plural	*ai-sa-ire*	*ma-ja-ire*	*le-sa-ire*
at same level	singular	*ai-va-nie*	*ai-va-nie/le-va-nie*	*le-va-nie*
	plural	*ai-va-ire*	*ai-va-ire/le-va-ire*	*le-va-ire*
descending direction	singular	*ai-sio-nie*	*ma-jio-nie*	*le-sio-nie*
	plural	*ai-sio-ire*	*ma-jio-ire*	*le-sio-ire*

(15)   *leva-nie*   *majio-ire*
          far.horizontal-3   intermediate.down-3P
          'that far horizontal'   'those intermediate down'

(16)   *Ia   tese   leva-nie   Ø   ta   logologo.*
          A:C   man   far.horizontal-3   3   R   bad
          'That man is bad.' (refering to a man who is a long way from the speaker)

Demonstrative pronouns can also express direction in terms of time, but they are restricted to only those with the bound morphemes of *get-, le-* and *ai-*.

(17)   *ia   vla   le-sio-nie*
          A:C   moon   distal-decline-3
          'the month before last'

(18)   *ia   vla   ai-sio-nie*
          A:C   moon   proximal-decline-3
          'last month'

Most demonstratives usually provide definite reference in the discourse. However, some indefinite pronouns provide anonymous reference, such as *taptua* 'one', *tapmera* 'someone', *tapsava* 'something' and *naonei* 'that person/thing' (usually with negative connotation).

3.3 Nouns

Nouns are heads of noun phrases, which is one of the main nominal constituents of the clause structure as subject and object. They can also be the objects of prepositional phrases. Noun classes are marked by articles, which may also be considered as nominal markers that require nominals to be either definite or specific (Pawley & Reid 1980:116). In some instances, words can be used as either a verb or a noun.

Nouns are divided into two classes typical of Oceanic noun classification, namely common and personal. A personal noun is preceded by the article *i* (from the POc personal nominal marker **i*). A common noun is preceded by the article *ia* or its less common variant *na* (probably from a variation of the POc common nominal marker **na*) (Pawley & Reid 1980:116; Pawley 1973:112). Instead of *ia a-gu* 'mine/my food', *sei ia* 'for', and *balein ia*

sava 'like what, how', some Merei speakers may say *na a-gu, sei na* and *balein na sava.* The form *na* is also the article of some of the language groups which are found north of the Merei group. The form *ia* can also be followed by a relative clause and form a nominal argument (see §3.10).

Most common nouns, e.g. *bo* 'pig', *mata-gu* 'my eye', *ran* 'day', belong to the common class. Common class nouns vary in that they can be either directly possessed or indirectly possessed and some can be both, although with different meanings (§3.7.3).

Personal class nouns are those denoting proper personal names and also directly possessed referential kinship nouns, e.g. *Pita* 'Peter', *tama-na* 'his father', *rabui-gu* 'my mother'.

In addition there are two other classes of nouns, local and temporal. Local class nouns are those denoting the proper name of a location, or inherently places, e.g. *Vila* 'Vila', *Kanel* 'Luganville'. Temporal class nouns are those denoting time, e.g. *arongo* 'today', *ananop* 'yesterday', *tuai* 'a long time before' (see §5.3.3).

Both local and temporal classes always occur as peripheral arguments and need not take any location preposition (cf. §5.3.1). Temporal nouns always occur as peripheral arguments for time reference and usually in the outside layer of the clause periphery compared with the location argument (cf. §5.3.3).

All noun phrases have to begin with an article except for the location and temporal class nouns. There are three kinds of articles: common referential (A:C), common non-referential (A:NR) and personal/human nouns (A:P). Referential common nouns and human/personal nouns share the same dual and plural articles. The non-referential common article has only singular form.

Table 7: Articles

		Singular	Dual	Plural
Common	Referential	*ia*	*iarau*	*iadu*
	Non-referential	*al*	—	—
Personal		*i*	*iarau*	*iadu*
Local/temporal		Ø	—	—

Articles function as a marking of reference and number. Usually the referential article is the unmarked form and the non-referential articles are used in uncertain or negative mood for the common noun. Personal nouns do not take the non-referential articles, but instead take non-referential pronouns, e.g. *ani-nie* 'that' or *ani-re* 'those' (cf. §3.2'). Articles also distinguish among the common nouns, personal nouns and the location/temporal noun. Thus:

(19)   y*a mali-m*   'your house'
         al tese   'any man'
         i Pita   'Peter'
         i rabui-na   'his mother'
         Vila   'Vila' (location class noun)
         iarau tese   'two men'
         iadu natu-m   'your children'
         ia sava   'What?'

In addition articles function as nominal markers for those lexical items that belong to two grammatical categories. For example, *usa* 'rain' can be a verb or noun. On the other hand, *jip* 'knife' or 'cut' can also be a verb or noun. There may be some linkage between the categories of noun and verb.

(20)   *Ø ta   jip.*   *ia   jip*
          3 R   knife   A:C   knife
          'He cuts.'   'the knife'

(21)   *Ø ta   usa.*   *ia   usa*
          3 R   rain   A:C   rain
          'It rains.'   'the rain'

3.4 Number-marking and numerals

The nouns can also be divided into two classes, countable and uncountable. Number-marking and numerals can only be applied to countable nouns. The number of the noun is usually indicated by the number of the article. The noun classifier *mor-* 'many' and *tap-* 'a few' can also be used to mark the number. Thus:

ia tese	'the man'
iarau tese	'the two men'
iadu tese	'the men'
ia mor-tese	'many men'
ia tap-tese	'a few men'

Partial reduplication of some nouns can be a pluralising device. Marking plurality follows a hierarchy of animacy in the order of human, animal, plant and non-living things. However, the plurality of kin terms is rarely marked. Reduplication (RED) can be used to pluralise some nouns (and some verbs) (see §4.6.1).

(22)   *marakir*   *marakir-kir*
          child   child-RED
          'child'   'children'

3.4.1 Cardinal numbers

The Merei numeral system seems to be based on a quinary system. The numerals from one to five are unique forms. Numerals between five and nine are basically compounds of the form of either five, or two to four. However, not every morpheme of the numeral can be identified and be glossed.

Table 8: Cardinal numbers

1	*ese*	'one'
2	*rua*	'two'
3	*tol(u)*	'three'
4	*vat(i)*	'four'
5	*l(i)ma*	'hand'
6	*l(i)ma-ravo*	hand-??
7	*ravo-rua*	??-two
8	*rap-tol(u)*	??-three
9	*rai-tat*	??-four
10	*sa-ngavul*	??-ten
11	*sa-ngavul ta ese*	??-ten R one
12	*sa-ngavul ta rua*	??-ten R two
20	*ngavul-rua*	ten-two
30	*ngavul-tol(u)*	ten-three
100	*lavul*	hundred or many
200	*lavul-rua*	hundred-two

Cardinal numbers also function as verb roots but always take a third person singular modality marker, *ta* or *mo*.

(23) *Ia   tese   Ø ta raitat.*
      A:C   man   3 R   eight
      'There are eight men.' (lit. the man is eight)

(24) *Mo   ese   e   mo   rua.*
      IRR3 one   or   IRR3 two
      'Maybe one or maybe two.'

Numerals between ten and twenty are formed by juxtaposing *sa-ngavul* 'go up ten', *ta* 'the realis marker' and the single digit number. Thus:

11	*sa-ngavul ta ese*
16	*sa-ngavul ta lmaravo*

The multiples of ten up to ninety consist of *ngavul* followed by the single digit number. Thus:

20	*ngavul rua*
40	*ngavul vat*

Complex numbers can be multiples of ten followed by *ta* and then a single digit number, as with numbers between ten and twenty. Thus:

35	*ngavul tol ta lma*
67	*ngavul lma-ravo ta ravo-rua*

One hundred is *ta lavul*. The multiples of hundreds up to nine hundred are formed from *ta lavul* followed by a single digit number. Thus:

200	*ta lavul rua*
500	*ta lavul lma*

The verb *va* 'go, come' can be used as a multiplication device. (This form seems related to the POc multiplication particle and verb **pa*.) Thus:

| 20 | *sangavul va rua* | 'ten times two' |
| 300 | *ta lavul va tol* | 'hundred times three' |

For monetary units speakers will use borrowed words from either English or French via Bislama: *siling* 'shilling', which means 10 vatu; *pad* 'pound', which means 200 vatu and *mil* or *tao* 'thousand', which means 1000 vatu. (Vatu, which means 'stone' in some vernacular, is the unit of currency of Vanuatu.)

3.4.2 Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers are formed in a way similar to the direct possession structure (see §3.7.1), which is formed by putting an article *ia* or *i* before the numeral and adding the personal article with the pronominal possessive suffix or another noun head.

(25)   *i   rua-i-na*
        A:P   two-A:P-3
        'its second'

(26)   *ia   vati-ra*
        A:C   four-A:P-3P
        'their fourth'

3.5 Nominal modifying and adjectives

Nominal modifying can by handled by descriptive relative clauses, noun compounding involving other nouns and verbs.

Most nominal modifying is handled by descriptive relative clauses (see §3.10). However, some can be handled by juxtaposing nouns for material or gender.

(27)   *ia   mano lepne*
        A:C   bird   woman
        'the female bird'

Nominal attributive modifying for propensity or colour can be combined with intransitive verb roots. However, the compound can be used to denote different species.

(28)   *ia   marta*
        A:C   snake
        'the snake'

(29)   *ia   marta   ta   kara*
        A:C   snake   R   red
        'the red snake'   OR: 'the snake is red'

(30)   *ia   marta   kara*
        A:C   snake   red
        'earth worm'

Prepositional phrases are another means for modifying nominal for possessive, generic-specific and source relationships (see §5.3.1).

Stative verbs can be used to describe nominal arguments. The following are the stative verb of seven 'adjectival' semantic types (Dixon 1977:31):

Dimension:

(31)   *Ia   votal   Ø ta kiri.*
          A:C   banana 3   R   small
          'The banana is small.'

Physical Property:

(32)   *Ia   sule   Ø ta bunga.*
          A:C   stone 3   R   heavy
          'The stone is heavy.'

Colour:

(33)   *Ia   toa   Ø ta kara.*   OR: *Ia   toa   kara*
          A:C   chicken 3   R ed   A:C   chicken red
          'The chicken is brown.'   'The brown chicken.' (as a kind of chicken)

Human Propensity:

(34)   *Ia   tese   Ø ta mismis.*   OR: *ia   tese   mismis*
          A:C   man 3   R   lie   A:C   man lie
          'The man lies.' (can be just on one occasion)   'the liar' (habitual)

Age:

(35)   *Ø   ta   varese.*
          3   R   old.male
          'He is old.'

Value:

(36)   *Ia   jip   Ø ta mamasa.*
          A:C   knife 3   R   good
          'The knife is good.'

Speed:

(37)   *Ko Ø   kel   abu-abu-kara.*
          2   IPT   run   fire-fire-red
          'You run fast.'

There is only one adjective, *toro-*, which can be the nominal modifier in both attributive and predicate positions. When it functions as an attributive nominal modifier, it always precedes the noun head.

(38)   *ia   toro tese*
          A:C   big   man
          'the big man (important man)'

It can also be a predicate in a stative clause. In this case, the adjective stem is followed by the possessive third person suffix, which is similar to the inalienable possessive classifier *nou-*, which is common in western Melanesian languages (Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002). Thus:

(39)   *Ia   tese Ø ta toro-na.*
        A:C   man 3 R   big-3
        'The man is big.'

The counterpart of *toro-* is *nat-* 'small', which is also an inalienable kin term 'child'. However, it cannot be a predicate.

(40)   *ia   nat   jip*
        A:C   son   knife
        'the small knife'

(41)   **Ia   jip   Ø   ta   nat-na.*
        A:C   knife 3   R   son-3

Thus it is not considered as an adjective. Occasionally words of colour and number can be put before the noun head, but they usually appear as stative verbs. Comparative nominal modifying is formed by serialisation of the stative verb with the verb *nui* 'be superlative; than' (cf. §4.7.1).

3.6 Noun compounding

Bi-morphemic nouns are common in Merei. The compounding includes noun-verb compounding and noun-noun compounding. The order of the arguments in compounding depends on their semantic domain. Sometimes the nouns are fused together and it is hard to determine which is head. Thus:

Table 9: Noun compounding

(Noun of container)	(Inalienable noun root)	Noun	(Material)	(Intransitive verb root)

Compounding of noun stems with intransitive verb roots is common.

(42)   *votal-mena*   *tese-mismis*
        banana-ripe   man-lie
        'kind of banana which can be eaten raw'   'liar'

There are at least a dozen inalienable nouns which are highly productive in noun-noun compounding. Early (1994a:107) refers to a similar bound category in Lewo as noun formatives, but such nouns in Merei also occur as unbound independent inalienable nouns. They are mainly in the semantic domains of shape, part-whole and location, either with third person possessive suffixes or else with noun heads, usually common nouns. Thus:

(43)   *su-na*   *su-sule*   *su-matui*
        heap-3   heap-stone   heap-coconut
        'its heap'   'stone heap'   'coconut heap'

(44)   *matai-na*   *matai-kokomea*   *matai-jip*
        thorn-3   stick-metal   stick-knife
        'its thorn'   'metal-wire'   'knife'

(45)   *matai-iau*   *vui-kokomea*   *vui-iau*
        stick-wood   log-metal   log-wood
        'branch'   'iron pole'   'wooden log (trunk)'

The compounding of a noun of container with a noun of being contained is also common.

(46)   *bugen-bei*   *pake-rais*
        cup-water   packet-rice
        'cup of water'   'packet of rice'

The compounding of a noun followed by a noun of the material that the first noun is made of is also possible.

(47)   *bugen-kokomea*   *bugen-kilas*
        cup-metal   cup-glass
        'metal cup'   'glass cup'

Compounding is not limited to two elements. Thus:

(48)   *ia*   *su-vona-matui-gor*
        A:C   heap-fruit-coconut-dry
        'the heap of dry coconuts'

In languages with few adjectives usually human propensity is expressed by nouns and the shape is modified by verbs (Schachter 1996:14–15). However, in Merei expressing human propensity is usually done by compounding with verbs, but expressing shape is usually done by direct possessive constructions involving the class of inalienable nouns mentioned above. Thus it is another counter example to the typical statistical trend.

3.7 Possessive constructions

There are two possessive constructions in Merei, direct and indirect. When both are possible, with direct possession the possessed is more closely linked to the possessor as compared to indirect possession (see §3.7.3).

Possessive construction in Merei is typical Oceanic (Lynch 1973:76–79, 83). There are different types of the classifiers and genitive prepositions of indirect possessive according to the edibility of the noun heads, but with *bur* 'tattoo' as an exceptional member of edible noun (see §3.7.2). The non-singular pronominal possessive suffixes are almost identical with the pronominal object suffixes, which provide additional evidence for Lynch's (1973:82–83) hypothesis of verbal construction and the possessive (see §3.1).

3.7.1 Direct possession

In direct pronominal possession a possessed inalienable noun head is followed by a possessive pronominal suffix (listed in Table 4). This construction is typically associated with body parts, kin terms and part-whole or location relationship. Thus:

(49)   *ia*   *mata-m*
        A:C   eye-2
        'your eye'

(50)   *i   natu-gu*
        A:P   child-1
        'my child'

(51)   *la   vsa-na*
        L/T   top-3
        'on its top'

Where the possessor is a nominal, the directly possessed noun is followed by the possessor noun phrase. Thus:

(52)   *ia   natu   ia   bo*
        A:C   child   A:C   pig
        'the pig's child'

(53)   *ia   lma   i   Pita*
        A:C   hand   A:P   Pita
        'Peter's hand'

(54)   *i   rabui   i   Pita*
        A:P   mother   A:P   Pita
        'Peter's mother'

The speech complementiser *tale-* also takes the direct possessive construction (see §7.2).

3.7.2 Indirect possession

In indirect pronominal possession the indirectly possessed alienable noun head is preceded by a Possessive Classifier, *nou-* for inedible nouns (POSSC.I) or *a-* (or less commonly *na-*) for edible and drinkable nouns (POSSC.E), followed by the possessive pronominal suffix. Thus:

(55)   *nou-gu   uma*
        POSSC.I-1   garden
        'my garden'

(56)   *a-gu   sna*
        POSSC.E-1   yam
        'my yam'

In indirect nominal possession the indirectly possessive noun head is followed by a genitive preposition, *nui* for inedible (GEN.I) and *nai* for edible (GEN.E), which are followed by the possessor noun. Thus:

(57)   *ia   bo   nui   Loretta*
        A:C   pig   GEN.I   Loretta
        'Loretta's pig'

(58)   *ia   sei-beda   nai   Loretta*
        A:C   piece-taro   GEN.E   Loretta
        'Loretta's taro-piece'

The genitive preposition *nui* for alienable nouns is also used as a verb meaning 'win, be superlative or in control' (cf. §5.3.1).

The benefactive preposition *sei* can also function as a genitive preposition. It operates as part of the noun phrase and functions like a descriptive nominal modifier or a possessive construction (cf. §5.3.1).

(59)   *ia   tese   sei   Vila*
         A:C   man   BEN   Vila
         'the man from Vila'

(60)   *Gata-nie ia   uluvara   sei-na.*
         that-3   A:C   story   BEN-3
         'That is story about him.'

(61)   *Gata-nie ia   nou-na   uluvara.*
         that-3   A:C   POSSC.I-1   story
         'That is his story (the story that he told).'

3.7.3 Both direct and indirect possession

Some nouns can be either indirectly possessed or directly, as in other Oceanic languages, like Aroma, Suau and Fijian (Lynch 1973:76). However, the meaning can be different. In indirect possession, the relationship between the possessed and the possessor is not as close as the direct possessive. Thus:

(62)   *ia   nou-gu   bong*
         A:C   POSSC.I-1   night
         'my night' (the day of celebration for me)

(63)   *ia   bong i   ia   vla   Ø ta   ese*
         A:C   night A:P   A:C   month   3 R   one
         'the first day of the month'

(64)   *ia   nou-gu   sala*
         A:C   POSSC.I-1   road
         'my road'

(65)   *ia   sala-gu*
         A:C   road-1
         'my way' (way of going or doing thing)

3.8 Basic noun phrase structure

The noun phrase structure is typical of Oceanic languages. It consists of a noun head preceded by an obligatory article (except before a proper local or temporal noun). Only possessive classifiers and adjectives can be placed between the head noun and article. Only numbers can be placed between the head noun and demonstratives. Relative clauses can be placed at the end of the noun phrase or even replace the whole noun phrase except for the article (see §3.10). Thus:

Table 10: Basic noun phrase

(Article)	(Possessive classifier)	(Adjective)	Head noun	(Number)	(Demonstrative)	(Relative clause)

(66)   *iadu   nou-gu   se-ruru-kara   get-ire*
       A:C.PL   POSSC.I-1   piece-cloth-red   these
       'these red clothes of mine'

(67)   *iarau   marakir*
       A:C.dual   child
       'the two children'

3.9 Complex noun phrases

Complex noun phrases are quite straightforward with two types, coordinate and conjoined. In coordinate complex noun phrases two or more noun phrases can be coordinated by simple juxtaposition, with an intonation of slight rise and pause at the end of each item before the last. Thus:

(68)   *ia   beta   ia   sna*
       A:C   taro   A:C   yam
       'the taro and the yam'

In conjoined complex noun phrases, the basic pattern is to link them with the instrumental preposition *peseri*, the conjunction *maga* or the third person dual pronoun *ireruva*. The preposition *peseri* is used with a co-participant; *maga* has a slightly subordinate or procedural sense, while *ireruva* is restricted to animate arguments (i.e. human or personified nominal argument). In a series of conjoined complex noun phrases, usually only the last two items are conjoined with either one of the three conjunctions and the rest are simply juxtaposed as a list. However, if the speakers need time to think about the item, then they put the conjunction between every item.

(69)   *ia   esio   peseri ia   maji*
       A:C   king-fisher   with   A:C   fish
       'the kingfisher with the fish'

(70)   *ia   tese   Ø   ta   ese   ireruva i i   nat-na*
       A:C   man   3   R   one   and   A:P   child-3
       'a man and his son'

(71)   *i   Erickson,   i   Pita,   i   John   Mark   maga   i   Shadrack*
       A:P   Erickson   A:P   Peter   A:P   John   Mark   after   A:P   Shadrack
       'Erickson, Peter, John Mark and then Shadrack'

3.10 Relative clauses

Relative clauses can function as nominal arguments in main clauses and they also can modify core arguments or peripheral arguments (cf. § 3.5). They always occur at the end of the noun phrase and function as descriptive modifiers.

Non-restrictive relative clauses are postposed to the nominal head through simple juxtaposition, which is also a typical phenomenon in languages without copular verbs (Schachter 1996:56). The structure is highly dependent on context and pause to distinguish it from a simple coordinate clause.

(72)   *Nam ta rao ia   toa   [Ø ta kara].*
        1   R   take A:C chicken   3   R   red
        'I take a chicken that is red.'   OR: 'I take the chicken. It is red.'

(73)   *<u>Ia   toa</u>   [Ø ta kara] ta mate.*
        A:C chicken 3   R   red   R   die
        'The chicken, which was red, died.'   OR: 'The chicken is red. It died.'

(74)   *Nam ta gogo ia bei   sei <u>ia   vui-tank</u>   [ire tato*
        1   R   drink A:C water BEN A:C trunk-tank   they R.3P

        vai   tei].
        make   PERF.TR
        'I drank the water of the tank they made.'

Restrictive relative clauses are postposed to the nominal head, with the clause being relativised preceded by a free pronoun or demonstrative pronoun. Thus:

(75)   *Nam ta rao <u>ia   toa   kara ani-nie</u>   [Ø ta sale la*
        1   R   take A:C chicken red   which-sg   3   R   fly   L/T

        loloi-mali-gu].
        inside-house-1
        'I take the red chicken, the one flew in my house.'

The article, without a noun head, can function as the relativiser of a relative clause.

(76)   *<u>Ia</u> [Ø ta kiri] Ø ta tel <u>ia</u>   [Ø ta torona].*
        A:C 3   R   small 3   R   hit A:C 3   R   big
        'The small one hit the big one.'

It is also suspected that *ta* can function as inalienable noun head.

(77)   *ia   ta   Merei/Tiale*
        A:C group   Merei/Tiale
        'the man of Merei/Tiale' (Merei/Tiale speaker)

(78)   *Ia   ta   sava?*
        A:C group   what
        'Which group?' (What colour?)

All four grammatical functions, subject, object, indirect object and oblique, within the relative clause can be relativised.

Relativised subject:

(79)   *Ia   <u>tese nanie</u> [Ø ta tuatua] Ø ta vana-in   la vuivora.*
        A:C man that   3   R   crazy   3   R   come-OD   L/T place
        'That man, who is crazy, is coming into the village.'

Relativised object:

(80)   *Nam ta lili   la   <u>peipa</u> [i   Loretta Ø ta vol].*
        1   R   write L/T   paper   A:P Loretta 3   R   buy
        'I write on paper which Loretta bought.'

Relativised indirect object:

(81)   *Ia   pen   nanie   nui   ia   tese   [i   tama-na   Ø   ta   gure   asi-na].*
        A:C   pen   that   belong   A:C   man   A:P   father-3   3   R   give   DAT-3
        'That pen belonged to the man, whom his father gave to.'

Relativised oblique:

(82)   *I   nie   Ø   ta   va-in   la   vuivora   [al   mol   sei-na   va   merei].*
        A:P   3   3   R   go-OD   L/T   place   A:NF   chief   for-3   go   no
        'He is going to a place where is no Chief (of it).'

4 *Verbs and verb phrases*

4.1 Basic verb phrase structure

The verbal morphology and verb phrase syntax are relative simple compared with that of some other Northern Central Vanuatu languages, like Raga (Walsh 1994:813–815), and with other Oceanic language (see Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002). The verb phrase consists of a verb stem with an obligatory subject pronoun clitic and modality marker. Other preverbal constituents mark manner. A postverbal constituent is an aspect marker or adverb (see Pawley & Reid 1980:105).

Table 11: Basic verb phrase

Subject pronoun clitic	Modality marker	(Manner marker)	Verb	(Aspect marker/ adverb)

No derivational voice device has been found. However, the function of passivisation can be accomplished by demotion of the subject using a third person plural subject clitic as in (83) or the anonymous demonstrative as in (84) as a reduced passive (see Pawley & Reid 1980:106).

(83) *Tato   ras   ia   tese.*
      3P.R   beat   A:C   man
      'They beat the man.'

(84) *I   tapmera   Ø   ta   an   tui.*
      A:P   someone   3   R   eat   IMP.TR
      'Someone was eating.'

The causative construction is periphrastic in a serial verb structure (see §4.7.1).

4.2 Verb inflection

There are close relationships between modality and the negative, and negation can be considered a propositional modality (Givon 1984:321). Thus the two are discussed in the same section and the inflections are put in the same paradigm.

The other significant feature of the verbal morphology is the alternation of realis, presupposition and irrealis marker. Irrealis is unmarked or marked by *mu-*, presupposition is unmarked or marked by *a-*, and realis is marked by *ta-*. This alternation is quite different

from what is found in the neighbouring languages and even the closely related Tiale, all of which have a pattern of modality marking similar to that posited for Proto Oceanic, namely *ma-* for realis and *na-* for irrealis (Lynch 1975:91). However, Paamese is similar to Merei in having *t-* marking as non-future (p.97).

4.2.1 Subject pronominal clitics

The subject pronominal clitics are obligatory constituents in the verb phrases except in some imperative clauses. The subject clitics always precede the other morphemes in a verb phrase. The non-third subject pronominal clitics distinguish between number and person, while the third person subjects regardless of their number are marked by a zero morpheme. The independent subject pronouns are optionally used for emphasis (see §3.1).

(85)   *Nam   ta   voro.*
         1   R   empty
         'I left.'

(86)   *I   nau   nam   ta   voro.*
         A:P   1   1   R   empty
         'I left.' (emphasise the subject)

Pronouns and verbs do not show gender. However, the stative verbs/nouns for old/old people, *varese* (male) or *kovarese* (female), have to agree with gender.

(87)   *Ia   tese   Ø ta   varese.*
         A:C   man   3 R   old.male
         'The man is old.'

(88)   *Ia   lepne   Ø ta   kovarese.*
         A:C   woman   3 R   old.female
         'The woman is old.'

(89)   **Ia   lepne   Ø ta   varese.*
         A:C   woman   3 R   old.male

4.2.2 Modality and negation

There are three modalities, namely realis (R), presupposition (PSP) and irrealis (IRR).

Table 12: Modality markers

		Positive			Negative	
		Realis	Presupposition	Irrealis	Presupposition	Realis/Irrealis
Non-third person		*ta*	*Ø*		*tei*	
Third person	Singular	*ta*	*a*	*mo*	*atei*	*motei/mutei*
	Dual	*tara*	*ara*	*mora*	*aratei*	*moratei*
	Plural	*tato*	*ato*	*moto*	*ateita*	*moteita/muteita*

The inflection for modality of the non-third person only has two forms, *ta* for realis and zeros for both presupposition and irrealis, while the presupposition for third person marking *a-* is different from its irrealis marking *mo-*. Dual and plural forms for the third person markers are formed by adding the suffixes *-ra* and *-to* respectively. The modality markers can be regarded as auxiliary elements as defined by Steele (1978:10–11).

There are also negative (NEG) forms of the modality markers. All non-third person forms share the same form *tei*. The third person singular and dual negative forms can be formed by adding *tei* to the end of the positive form, whereas in the plural *tei* is added before the plural suffix *-ta*.

Although there is no tense marking, modality is associated with past or present time in a binary tense system of future and non-future.

The realis mode indicates that the speaker is sure of the content. The presupposition mode is associated with a future event that the speaker is thinking will happen. The irrealis mode is associated with something that the speaker is sure will not happen or did not happen. Thus, the irrealis mode is widely used in polar questions (see §6.2.1).

(90)　　*Bavio*　　　*mo*　　*usa.*
　　　　tomorrow　IRR.3　rain.
　　　　'It might rain tomorrow.'

(91)　　*Bavio*　　　*a*　　　*sio-ma.*
　　　　tomorrow　PSP.3　go.down-return
　　　　'He will return tomorrow.' (I am quite sure)

(92)　　*Bavio*　　　*mo*　　*sio-ma*
　　　　tomorrow　IRR.3　go.down-return
　　　　'He might return.' (I am not sure)

(93)　　*Ø ta　usa.*
　　　　3　R　　rain
　　　　'It rains.' / 'It has rained.' / 'It rained.'

(94)　　*Ananop*　　*Ø ta usa.*
　　　　yesterday　3　R　rain
　　　　'It rained yesterday.'

4.2.3 Preverbal manner morphemes

There is a class of preverbal manner morphemes: *bai* 'just, able' and *tau* 'again'. Both are optional. The negation of *bai* takes the marking of negative presupposition mode, to express the meaning 'not able'.

(95)　　*Ø ta　tau　　sa-ma.*
　　　　3　R　again　go.up-return
　　　　'He came back again.'

(96)　　*Ø ta　bai　sa-ma.*
　　　　3　R　just　go.up-return
　　　　'He has just came back.'

(97)   *Atei   bai   sa-ma.*
        PSP.3.NEG   able   go.up-return
        'He is not able to come back.'

4.2.4 Postverbal object pronominal suffix

The postverbal object pronominal suffix is obligatorily placed after the transitive verb if there is no nominal object. However, the third person singular object pronoun is a zero morpheme (see Table 4 in §3.1).

(98)   *Ø ta   tel-ko*
        3 R   hit-2
        'He hits you.'

(99)   *Ø ta   tel-Ø.*
        3 R   hit-3
        'He hits (it).'

4.2.5 Postverbal aspect markers

There are different postverbal aspect markers marking two aspects as 'different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation' as Comrie (2001:3) defined it, namely perfective (PERF) and imperfective (IMP). They vary according to whether the verb is transitive or intransitive.

Table 13: Aspect markers

	Transitive	Intransitive
Imperfective	*tui*	*to*
Perfective	*tei*	*tau*

The aspect markers are optional but highly productive. They are mainly affirmative. The imperfective and perfective can express counter aspects to each other. We can see that the imperfective and perfective are the primary opposition in aspect as Comrie suggested (Comrie 2001:3).

The transitive aspect markers can occur after the pronominal object suffix or free pronoun but before the object noun phrase.

(100)   *Ø ta   vai   tui.*
        3 R   make   IMP.TR
        'He is making it.'

(101)   *Kama ta vai   tui   ia   sala-na*
        1E   R   make   IMP.TR   A:C   road-3
        'We make the road (of it).'

(102)   *Ø ta   tai   tei.*
        3 R   build   PERF.TR
        'He has built it.'

(103)   Ø   *ta*   *tel*   *ko*   *tei.*
        3   R   hit   2   PERF.TR
        'He had hit you.'

The intransitive aspect markers are always found at the end of the verb phrase. Thus:

(104)   Ø   *ta*   *mamasa*   *tau.*
        3   R   good   PERF.INTR
        'It has become good.'

(105)   Ø   *ta*   *malao*   *to.*
        3   R   stay   IMP.INTR
        'He is staying home.'

All the aspect markers resemble forms having other meanings, namely *tui* 'probe', *to-* 'place; stay', *tei* 'but, negative particle', and *tau* 'again, back (body-part)'. Thus, they seem to provide evidence of the process of grammaticalisation.

4.2.6 Adverbs

The adverbs are very similar to aspect markers and they are in complementary distribution with the aspect markers. However, they are less productive and function differently. Adverbs are modifiers of verbs. There are two adverbs for stative verbs, namely *nenel* 'a bit' and *nonom* 'very', and two other for transitive or reciprocal verbs, *nenel-in* 'a bit' and *nono-in-im* 'very' (*nono* is also a stative verb 'be different', see also §5.4.1). Thus:

(106)   Ø   *ta*   *torona*   *nenel.*
        3   R   big   a.bit
        'It is a little bit big.'   (not really big)

(107)   Ø   *ta*   *torona*   *nono-m.*
        3   R   big   different-TD
        'It is very big.'

(108)   Ø   *ta*   *potpot*   *nono-in-im.*
        3   R   happy   different-OD-TD
        'He felt very happy.'

(109)   *Ia*   *toa*   *getua*   *ia*   *morna*   *nono-m*
        A:C   chicken   here   A:C   many   different-TD
        'Here are many many chickens.'

4.3 Verb derivation

The derivational affixes of the verb are not very productive.

4.3.1 Transitive derivative

Most of the transitive verbs end with *i* for patient object (e.g. *ngoboi* 'snatch', *tai* 'build', *tui* 'pierce', *varai* 'said', *pmei* 'shoot') as vestiges of the POc transitive marker **-i* (Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002:10; Pawley 1973:114; Clark 1973:565; Ross pers. comm.).

There is no morphological difference between optional and obligatory transitive verbs as found in other typical Oceanic languages because the third person singular pronominal suffix is Ø (see Pawley 1973:112).

4.3.2 Stative verb derivative

Another vestige of POc is the stative derivative prefix *ma-*, which is found in Merei stative verbs, most of which begin with *ma-*. Those verbs are usually have semantic orientations of attribute, characteristic or posture (Pawley 1973:141); e.g. *mamasa* 'good', *mangis* 'sweat', *malabo* 'sleep', *maladum* 'level', *mada* 'ripe/ cooked', *mamap* 'tame'.

A similar derivational marker was found in Lewo as a 'stative performative' (Early 1994:143), but the rest of the verb roots are not used independently in Merei.

4.3.3 Local orientation derivative

A local orientation derivative is the post-verbal marker *-ma* and its allomorph *-na*, which signifies that the motion is towards the addressee and speaker, the same function as the verb stem postformative *-asu* in Lewo (Early 1994:144). This can also be compared to the intermediate locational adverb, *ma-*, which indicates within the hamlet or next hamlet (cf. §5.3.2), and may thus relate to *-ma* and *-na*, which also has the semantic content of 'local'.

Table 14: Motion verb with *-ma*

sa	'go up'	*sa-ma*	'come up'
va	'go' (level)	*va-na*	'come' (level)
sio	'go down'	*sio-ma*	'come down'

(110)   *Ko sio-ma*
       2   go.down-return
       'You come down.' (as one is calling other coming down from the tree)

(111)   *Ko sa-ma*
       2   go.up-return
       'You come up.' (as one is calling other coming up from the river)

4.4 Verb compounding

Compounding of verb roots is common. The new combinations are freely created from at least one independent verb root. The meaning of the resulting stem need not be the sum of the meaning of the two original morphemes. The compounded verb can also become the constituent of a serial verb (see §4.7). Thus:

(112)   *aliali-rongo*
       walk.RED-feel
       'try'

(113)   *rongo-in   suru*
         feel-OD   punch
         'obey'

(114)   *Al   tua-mi   motei   ali-ali-rongo   rongo-in   suru.*
         A:NF brother-2P R.3.NEG   walk-RED-feel   hear-OD   punch.
         'Your brother did not try to obey.'

4.5 Object incorporation

Some transitive verbs can combine with generic nominal objects without the articles and form an intransitive verb. Such 'incorporated non-specific object' construction is another typical feature of Fijian, Polynesian and Nuclear Micronesian languages (Pawley & Reid 1980:116; Pawley 1973:179). Compare (115), in which the object is not incorporated, with (116), in which it is.

(115)   *Ø   ta   pnei   tui   ia   maji.*
         3   R   shoot   IMP.TR   A:C   fish
         'He shoots the fish continually.'

(116)   *Ø   ta   pnei-maji   to.*
         3   R   shoot-fish   IMP.INTR
         'He is fish-shooting.'

That (116) is intransitive is clear from the intransitive marker *to*, replacing the transitive marker *tui* of example (115).

4.6 Reduplication

The reduplication of verbs expresses a wide range of functions, mainly including pluralising, detransitivising and other unpredictable semantic extensions, as well as derivation of nouns. The reduplication usually involves the whole word. However, some partial reduplication of the initial syllable(s) or final syllable(s), especially in words of more than two syllables, is common and those words thus are suspected of being bi-morphemic.

(117)   *luei*   *ma-luelue*
         spit   STAT-lue.RED
         'spit'   'miscarry'

(118)   *malabo*   *mala-malabo*
         sleep   RED-sleep
         'sleep'   'be sleepy'

(119)   *maloa*   *malo-maloa*
         slow   RED-low
         'slow'   'soft'

4.6.1 Pluralising

Most of the reduplication of action verbs pluralises the action. Thus:

(120)   *giri*   'grate one time'   *giri-giri*   'grate repeatedly'
         gaorum   'scratch'   *gaorum-gaorum*   'scratch repeatedly'
         bin   'peel'   *bin-bin*   'peel repeatedly'

(121)   *Tato   mate-mate.*
         R.3P   die-RED
         'They die continuously.'

In some cases, the noun can be pluralised by reduplication. Thus, *marakir* 'child', *marakir-kir* 'children'.

4.6.2 Emphasising

The reduplication of stative verbs, locationals and some time words (cf. §5.3.3) functions as an emphasiser.

(122)   *kiri-kiri*   *leva-leva*   *mor-morna*
         small-RED   far.away-RED   RED-many
         'very small'   'far far away'   'many many'

4.6.3 Detransitivising

The reduplication of some transitive action verbs can produce intransitive verbs. Thus:

(123)   *ali*   'walk with a destination'   *ali-ali*   'walk without a destination'
         varai   'say'   *vara-vara*   'talk'
         dom   'think' (transitive)   *dom-dom*   'think' (intransitive)
         lopso   'wash/bath' (transitive)   *lo-lopso*   'bath' (intransitive/reflexive)

4.6.4 Unpredictable

A few cases of reduplication of verbs are just unpredictable.

(124)   *logo*   'hungry'   *logo-logo*   'be bad'
         lobo   'cover' (verb)   *lobo-lobo*   'cloud' (noun)
         dum   'fight'   *dum-dum*   'blaze' (verb)
         va   'go'   *va-va*   'go hunting'

4.6.5 Repetition as change of time/episode

It is common to repeat the verb of motion or staying for three or four times as the change of time or episode in the discourse.

(125)   *Tara   sioto   sioto   sioto ...*
         R.3D   stay   stay   stay
         'When they(two) were staying ...'

(126)   *Tato   sa   sa   sa ...*
        R.3P   go.up   go.up   go.up
        'As they were going up ...'

4.7 Verb serialisation

Serial verb constructions are highly productive in Merei. They are two or more independent verbs juxtaposed in such a way that they act as a single predicate and neither verb is subordinate to the other (Durie 1988:3). They are easily recognised as the initial verb takes the preverbal morphemes of the pronominal subject, modality and aspect marker but the second verb does not.

All verbs of the verbal serialisation share at least one core argument. Certain groups of verbs can appear as the second member of serial constructions but cannot be an independent verb.

4.7.1 Subcategory according to semantic types

Serial verbs can be categorised according their semantic types, namely sequential, directional/prepositional, causative, and comparative/superlative.

Sequential serialisation is formed by an initial verb of motion followed by another verb as the expression of a sequence of actions.

(127)   *Ø   ta   va   jip.*
        3   R   go   cut
        'He goes to cut.'

(128)   *Te   va-na   bele.*
        1I   go-return   carry
        'Let us come to carry.'

(129)   S*a-ma   rion.*
        go.up-return   see
        'come see'

Directional/positional serialisation is formed by the initial finite verb being followed by a verb of motion. The directional motion verb shows the direction of the action of the initial verb. Thus:

(130)   *kai   sa*
        look   go.up
        'look up'

(131)   *rui   sio*
        go.in   go.down
        'go-inside down'

(132)   *suat   sio*
        set.off   go.down
        'set off descendingly'

Causative serialisation is formed by the initial finite transitive verb *vai* 'make', which is similar to the POc causative marking *pa-* (Pawley 1973:150; Ross pers. comm.), followed by a transitive or intransitive verb plus the transitivising suffix.

(133)   *Ø ta   vai   matau-iau.*
         3 R   make fear-1
         'He makes me afraid.'

(134)   *Ø ta   vai   logologo-in.*
         3 R   make bad-OD
         'He destroys it.'

Comparative/superlative serialisation is formed by an the intransitive verb followed by the verb *nui* 'be superior to; than'. This serial verb construction usually takes an object. Note that *nui* can be used as a particle for alienable possessive construction (see §3.7.2).

(135)   *I   nie Ø ta barap nui   iadu   tese vunvun.*
         A:P 3   3 R   tall   than A:C.PL man   everyone
         'He is taller than all men.'

4.7.2 Subcategory according to their relation to the nominal argument

Serial verb constructions can also be subcategorised into two categories according to the level of restrictions involving the nominal arguments.
Same subject of both verbs:

(136)   *Kama ta   sa   ron.*
         1E   R   go.up look
         'We go up and look.'

(137)   *Kama ta   sa   rao.*
         1E   R   go.up take
         'We go up and take (it).'

Switch subject with the initial transitive verb, followed by an intransitive stative verb:

(138)   *Ø ta   vai-ra   mate.*
         3 R   make-3P died
         'He cause them to die.'

(139)   *Ko lin   iau tui   sio   oso   tas.*
         2   wait 1   IMP.TR go.down reach sea
         'You keep waiting for me, until I reach the sea.'

5 *Clause structure*

This section provides a brief description of the verbless, equative clause followed by a discussion of the main constituents of verbal clause structures, namely core arguments and peripheral arguments. The postclitics are also handled in this section because they usually function within clause structures, although they can also operate within the noun phrases.

5.1 Verbless clauses

The equative clause is the only type of verbless clause in Merei. Equative clauses are generally expressed by simple juxtaposition of noun phrases with no intervening verb. Temporal nouns may be added to mark the time. Tense, aspect and mood are not marked. Thus:

(140) *Madia   i   nie   ia   toro-tese*.
       before A:P 3   A:C   big-man.
       'He was an important man.'

(141) *Ia   ese-na   Pupuvla*.
       A:C   name-3   Pupuvla
       'Her name is Pupuvla.'

(142) *Vai   i   re   Bethlehem ...*
       if   A:P 3P   Bethlehem
       'When they are in Bethlehem …'

Negation in verbless equative clauses is marked by the irrealis marker *mo* or its allomorph *mu* followed by the negative marker *tei*. This comes before the second noun phrase. In verbless equative clauses there is no longer a distinction of persons in marking irrealis: the particle *mo* or *mu* is used for all persons.

(143) *I   nau   motei   na   tasale*.
       A:P   1   IRR.3.NEG   A:C   white-man
       'I am not a white-man.'

(144)   *I   nie   motei   na   tija*.
        A:P   3   IRR.3.NEG   A:C   teacher
        'He is not a teacher.'

5.2 Verbal clauses: core arguments

The verb phrase as the predicate is the only obligatory constituent of the verbal clause. The predicate is preceded by the optional subject noun phrase, and followed by the object noun phrase (if the verb is transitive), prepositional phrase, location phrase and time phrase. The location phrase and time phrase slots can be filled by location and time words or by location and temporal prepositional phrases. The verbal clause structure is typical Eastern Oceanic and similar to the Proto Eastern Oceanic verbal phrase formula given by Pawley (1972:39).

Table 15: Verbal clause structure

(Subject noun phrase)	Verb phrase	(Object noun phrase)	(Prepositional phrase)	(Location phrase)	(Time phrase)

5.2.1 Intransitive clauses

The constituent order of intransitive clauses is SV. However, the verb with its subject and modality markers is the only obligatory constituent.

(145)   *Ko   ta   sa*.
        2   R   go.up
        'You went up.'

(146)   *Ia   lepne   Ø   ta   voro*.
        A:C   woman   3   R   leave
        'The woman left.'

Existential clauses follow the basic intransitive structure. However, the verb phrase slot will be filled by the realis marker followed by the verb *dauva* 'exist' to express existence.

(147)   *Ia   tese   Ø   ta   dauva*.
        A:C   man   3   R   exist
        'There is a man.'

(148)   *Ia   mor   tese   tato   dauva   Vila*
        A:C   many   man   R.3P   exist   Vila.
        'There are many men in Vila.'

Similarly, a negative existential clause follows the basic intransitive structure but the predicate slot is filled by the verb *va* 'go' followed by the negative deictic *merei* and the clause takes only a singular subject. Thus:

(149)   *Ia   bo   Ø   ta   dauva*.
        A:C   pig   3   R   exist
        'There is a pig.'

(150)   *Ia   bo   va   merei.*
        A:C   pig   go   no
        'There is no pig.'

5.2.2 Transitive clauses

Transitive clauses have an SVO basic constituent order except when the object is topicalised, as in (153). The object can be either in the form of pronominal suffix before the optional aspect marker or noun phrase after the optional aspect marker.

(151)   *I   Steven   Ø ta   ras   ia bo.*
        A:C   Stephen   3   R   killed   A:C pig
        'Steven killed the pig.'

Objects may be fronted for topicalisation.

(152)   *Ia   bo   i   Steven   Ø   ta   ras.*
        A:C   pig   A:C Stephen   3   R   kill
        'The pig, Steven killed it.'

More generally, the presence of an independent pronoun as subject or object marks contrast or focus. Subjects can also be topicalised by putting the independent pronoun after the subject.

(153)   *I   Steven   i   nie Ø ta   ras   ia   bo.*
        A:P   Stephen   A:P 3   3   R   killed   A:C   pig
        'Steven killed the pig.' (with emphasis that Steven is the one who killed)

5.3 Verbal clauses: peripheral arguments

Peripheral arguments in a clause are generally expressed by prepositional phrases or temporal nouns.

5.3.1 Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases usually consist of a noun phrase or pronominal object suffix preceded by a preposition, except that associative prepositional phrases involve pronouns or nominal noun phrases instead of pronominal object suffixes.

They communicate a variety of minor case roles for the peripheral arguments. These roles include instrument, associative, benefactive/source, destination, cause and locative/temporal. Some of the prepositions can have other functions within the complex noun phrases or in the sentence structures. Table 18 summarises the prepositions, including the genitive that was treated in §3.7.2.

Table 16: Prepositions

Prepositional phrase	Preposition	Function	Other function
Associative	*peser*	instrument or associate	noun phrase connective
Genitive	*nui, nai*	genitive, possessive	*nui* 'be superlative'
Benefactive	*sei*	benefactive	*sei-* noun classifier 'piece' *sei-na* introduce purpose clause
Destinational	*asi*	destination, source, comitative	*as* 'spread'
Causal	*belei*	reason or cause	*belei-na* introduce causal clause
Locative/temporal	*la*	location/temporal	

The associative prepositional phrase consists of a noun phrase or free pronoun preceded by the preposition *peser,* possibly derived from the verb *pesi* 'tie'. The prepositional phrase follows the verb phrase, and its noun head is an instrument or an associate (co-actor) in the action. Surprisingly, the aspect marker is added at the end of the associative prepositional phrase, as in (155). The instrumental preposition *peser* can also function as a connective in complex noun phrase structure (see §3.9).

(154)   *Na ta modi peser ia   jip.*
        1   R   cut   with   A:C   knife
        'I cut with the knife.'

(155)   *Ko sio   peser i   gamau tui.*
        2   descend   with   A:P   1E   IMP.TR
        'You will be present with us.'

(156)   *Ia esio   peser ia   maji moratei   vai.*
        A:C   kingfisher with   A:C   fish   IRR.3D.NEG   do
        'The kingfisher and the fish did not do (it).'

The benefactive prepositional phrase is made up of the benefactive preposition (BEN) *sei* followed by a noun phrase or pronominal suffix. This prepositional phrase occurs after the verb phrase. The noun head of the phrase has the role of beneficiary of the action of the clause.

(157)   *Ko ta vai sei   ise?*
        2   R   do   BEN   who
        'Who are you doing it for?'

(158)   *Ko ta vai   sei-iau.*
        2   R   work   BEN-1
        'You do (it) for me.'

In addition, *sei-na* 'for it' can also be used to introduce a purpose clause in a complex sentence construction (see§7.4.2).

The destination prepositional phrase (or dative, DAT) is made up of the dative preposition (DAT) *asi* followed by a noun phrase or pronominal suffix. The head carries the role of destination or recipient, either animate or location.

(159)   *Tato   gure   ia   votal   asi-mau.*
         R.3P   give   A:C   banana   DAT-1E.
         'They gave the banana to us.'

The nominal argument of the prepositional phrase can be destination, source or comitative, depending on the verb.

(160)   *Ø   ta   tarage   asi   Pita.*
         3   R   depart.from   DAT   Peter
         'He departs from Peter.'

(161)   *Nam   ta   aninian   to   asi-m.*
         1   R   eat   IMP.INTR   DAT-2
         'I ate with you.'

The causal prepositional phrase is made up of the preposition *belei* followed by a noun phrase or pronominal suffix. The head carries the role of reason or cause.

(162)   *Nam ta   vana   belei-m.*
         1   R   come   because-2
         'I come because of you.'

The preposition *belei* or *belei-na* is also used to introduce the dependent causal clause in a complex clause structure (see §7.4.3).

The locative/temporal preposition (L/T) is different from the rest of the prepositions because it alone shares a feature with the article, having number marking, i.e. *rau* 'dual' and *du* 'plural'. The locative/temporal prepositional phrase is made up of the preposition *la* followed by a noun without an article. It is placed either at the beginning or at the end of the clause to express time or location. It is placed further away from the verb phrase compared to other peripheral arguments. A temporal argument is usually placed further away from the verb phrase than a location argument. Fronting may topicalise the argument and is very common in the introduction of the setting in discourse.

(163)   *Nam ta   lolopso   la   bei   la   boibong.*
         1   R   bath   L/T   river   L/T   afternoon
         'I bathed in the river in the afternoon.'

In Oceanic languages it is not common to have more than three prepositions for marking the role or case of a nominal argument. However, in Merei the multiple functions of the preposition and some verbal marking in the associative prepositional phrase reflect a linkage between the verbs and prepositions. Thus the Merei prepositions could be the products of the grammaticalisation of the verb into prepositions (Rubba 1994:81). In addition, the semantic similarities between the verb and preposition may also suggest the serial verb construction has been a source of object case marking as another account of grammaticalisation (Givon 1984:179).

5.3.2 *Locational adverbs*

Locational adverbs are the peripheral argument providing locational reference for the clause. Locational adverbs can be divided into two classes according to different references: speaker–hearer reference and spatial reference. They usually function as peripheral arguments (cf. §5.3.3). However, they can also function as locations or temporal nominal arguments.

The speaker–hearer reference locational adverbs indicate the reference in terms of the distance from speaker and hearer.

Table 17: Speaker–hearer reference locational adverbs

Close to speaker	Close to both speaker and hearer	Close to hearer
naiia 'here'	*getua* 'here'	*(na)gata* 'there'

(164)   *Ø   ta   sioto   nagata   la   loloi-mal.*
         3   R   stay   there   L/T   inside-house.
         'He stays there inside the house.' (as peripheral)

(165)   *Getua   ia   vuivora   mamasa.*
         here   A:C   place   good
         'Here is a good place.' (as nominal argument)

The forms *naiia* and *nagata* can also be used in closing a discourse.

(166)   *Naiia   Ø   ta   soria*
         here   3   R   end
         'Here is the end.'

(167)   *Ia   uluvara   sei-na   Ø   ta   sor   nagata.*
         A:C   story   for-it   3   R   complete   there.
         'The story about it finishes there.'

The locationals indicate the spatial reference in terms of distance and direction with the speaker as reference point. They are combinations of the motion verbs and other bound morphemes for distance marking, namely *le-*, *ma-*, or *ai-,* as shown in Table 18. The distance reference includes proximate, i.e. a distance from within a house and its yard, intermediate is beyond a house and within a hamlet or to the next hamlet and distal is beyond the next hamlet. The direction reference includes ascending, descending and level. They can also function as a peripheral or adjunct before the prepositional phrase and after the verb but never as a core argument. The directional reference of these deixis always agrees with the direction of the motion verb.

Table 18: Spatial reference locational adverbs

	Proximal	Intermediate	Distal
Ascending direction	*ai-sa*	*maja*	*le-sa*
At same level	*ai-va*	*ai-va/le-va*	*le-va*
Descending direction	*ai-sio*	*majio*	*le-sio*

Thus:

(168)   *I   tama-m   Ø   ta   sa   lesa   la   bei.*
      A:P   father-2   3   R   go.up   far.up   L/T   river.
      'Your father goes up far away at the river.'

(169)   *Nam   ta   tada   lesa   la   nauma.*
      1   R   sit   far.up   L/T   bamboo
      'I sat on the bamboo which is far away up.'

Reduplication of the distal locational adverb functions as an emphatic device (see §4.6). Thus:

(170)   *leva-leva*
      RED-far
      'far far away'

The locational adverbs, such as *lesio*, *lesa*, *leva*, may be used as a short imperative utterance or command as 'get away', usually to a dog or cat, but seldom to a human (cf. §6.1).

5.3.3 Temporal adverbs

Temporal adverbs are a set of adverbs which function as peripheral arguments like temporal prepositional phrases. There is no inflective tense marking in the verb and tense is considered as the location in time (Comrie 1985:1–2). The location in time is marked by the temporal adverbs, which are neither obligatory nor morphologically bound (Comrie 1985:8–10, 49), with different degree of remoteness (Staley 1996), such as *tuai* 'long time ago, mythical past', *arongo* 'today' and *lailai* 'now'.

(171)   *Arongo iadu   tese   tato malabo.*
      today   A:C.PL   man   R.3P   sleep
      'Today the men sleep.'

Table 19: Past and future time words

Past	Future
anangnop 'yesterday'	*bavio* 'tomorrow'
anangsa 'the day before yesterday'	*bavasa* 'the day after tomorrow'
anangsasa 'the 2nd day before yesterday'	*bavasasa* 'the 2nd day after tomorrow'
anangsasasa 'the 3rd day before yesterday'	*bavasasasa* 'the 3rd day after tomorrow'

5.4 Postclitics

There are postclitics of various functions, namely pivot marking, futuristic marking and limiters. All are quite free in distribution at the end of a clause or noun phrase.

5.4.1 Directional postclitics

Clitics of directionals can be found in Oceanics. The directional postclitics are used to emphasise the direction of the action of the verb, which can be towards the actor, outwards the actor or inwards the actor. The towards directional *-m* usually emphasises the action towards the hearer and speaker. The outwards directional *-in* is used to emphasise the action away from the hearer and speaker, which is usually with the transitive verbs. The inwards directional *-inim*, which is only used to emphasise inwards the undergoers with the verb of reciprocal action or internal feeling.

The towards directional postclitic, *-m*, has the allomorphs *-im* after a consonant other than *m* and *-um* after *m*. Thus:

(172)   *Ø   ta   mamasa-m.*
         3   R   good-TD
         'It is really good.'

(173)   *Ø   ta   ding-im.*
         3   R   drain-TD
         'It had really drained.'

(174)   *Avea-m.*
         where-TD
         'Where!' (talking about the distance not far from the speaker and hearer)

(175)   *Ø   ta   tel-iau-m.*
         3   R   hit-1-TD
         'He (is the one) really hit me.'

(176)   *Ø   ta   gure asi-m-um.*
         3   R   give DAT-2-TD
         'He gave (it) really to you.'

The outwards directional postclitic, *-in*, is usually just after the verb phrase or the nominal predicate. Thus:

(177)   *Nam ta   va-in   Vila.*
         1   R   go-OD   Vila
         'I went to Vila.'

It can also apply to the verbless utterance, but this is very rare.

(178)   *Ia   sava-in?*
         A:C   what-OD
         'What happened (to him)?'

The inwards directional postclitic, *-inim*, seems only to apply to verbs for which the actor is at the same time the undergoer.

(179)   *Ø   ta   popot-inim.*
         3   R   happy-ID
         'He is really very happy.'

5.4.2 Futuristic postclitic

Another postclitic is the futuristic clitic (FUT) *ba*, which is from the Proto Austronesian interrogative form **ba* (Blust 1973:74). Usually it marks the futuristic focus or uncertainty of the event. It always agrees with the irrealis mode or presupposition mode in a clause.

(180)   *Ko ron-ba.*
        2   see-FUT
        'You wait and see.'

(181)   *Ko ron la   bong-ba.*
        2   see   L/T   night-FUT
        'You (wait and) see at night.'

(182)   *Bavio-ba.*
        tomorrow-FUT
        '(Let's see) tomorrow.' (wait until tomorrow)

5.4.3 Limiter postclitic

The limiter postclitic '*nga*' can be glossed as 'only' or 'just'. It can be put at the end of a noun phrase, after the reflexive pronoun *nese-*, complementiser *tale-* (cf. §7.2) or at the end of the clause.

(183)   *Ko tla   matau, i   nao nga.*
        2   PROHIB fear   A:P I   only
        'Dont be afraid, just me.'

(184)   *I   Philip Ø ta vauma nese-na   nga.*
        A:P Philiip 3   R   work   self-3   only
        'Philip just worked by himself.'

6 *Sentence types*

A single clause as described in the preceding section is the most common type of sentence. There are two main modifications according to the speech-act, namely imperative/hortative and interrogative.

6.1 Imperative and hortative

Both imperative (IPT) and hortative (HOR) can function as a command, with the stress in the beginning of the utterance, or as an invitation, with the stress at the end of the utterance. Some imperative utterances which just include a location word or verb without a subject clitic are strong commanding utterances which are not culturally appropriate unless one is commanding children or animals, as in (187) below. They have the same constituent ordering as indicative clauses with second person subject marker for invitation and without the subject marker for command, as in (188). There is no syntactic contrast between an imperative clause and an indicative clause in non-realis mood. The imperative and hortative are the same in syntactic structure.

The hortative functions as an inclusive invitation. Thus:

(185) *Te Ø ka.*
        1I HOR wait
        'Let's wait.'

(186) *Te Ø voro.*
        1I HOR leave
        'Let's leave.'

The imperative functions as an invitation towards a second party. Thus:

(187) *Ø sat.*
        IPT set.off
        'Set off.' (command)

(188) *Ø le-sio.*
        IPT away-down
        'Go away.' (strong command)

(189) *Ko Ø   an.*
       2   IPT   eat
       'You eat.' (invitation)

    Just uttering a second person or first person inclusive free pronoun is also a speech act of invitation, with the action being understood by the hearers.

(190) *I   go.*
       A:P   2
       'You (eat it).' (as one is giving you a piece of taro)

    Imperative and hortative clauses are negated by putting the particle of prohibition (PROHIB) *tla* after the subject pronoun. The negation of an imperative can function as either prohibition or pleading, depending on the intonation and context. Thus the distinction between prohibition and pleading depends on the meaning of verbs and intonation or requires a more specific declaration, like *varai malomalonga* 'speak softly' for pleading and *varai ore* 'prohibit' for prohibition. Thus:

(191) *Ko tla   an.*
       2   PROHIB   eat
       'Don't eat.'

(192) *Te tla   voro.*
       1I   PROHIB   leave
       'Let's not leave.'

(193) *Kamara tla   bat-voro-in.*
       1DE   PROHIB   head-empty-OD
       'Let's us not be naughty.'

6.2 Interrogative

6.2.1 Polar questions

    Polar questions are expressed simply through intonation and an optional final questioning interjection, *e merei*, 'or no' or just *e* 'or'. The question intonation always has a high rise at the end of the utterance instead of the fall or low pitch ending of the declarative. Thus:

(194) *Ia   nou-m   varavara mo   dauva sei-na?*
       A:C   POSSCI-2   saying   IRR.3 exist   BEN-3
       'Do you have something to talk about?'

(195) *Ø ta va e   merei?*
       3   R   go   or   not
       'Did he go?'

(196) *Ø ta sioto e?*
       3   R   stay   or
       'Is he here?'

    The answer 'yes' is *e.e* or *sabo* and 'no' is *merei*.

6.2.2 Content questions

Content questions are formed by putting question words or phrases in the position of the information requested. The question words can be classified into different grammatical categories and reflect the natural semantic or functional categories of the language. Some of them can be part of a possessive structure or prepositional phrase. The basic words for the content question are shown in Table 20.

These question words mainly function as interrogatives, unlike the otherwise similar epistememes in Lewo (Early 1994:171).

Table 20: Question words

ave-nie (sg) *ave-ire* (pl)	which
ave-a	where
belein na sava	why
balein i ave	how
i sava-	what relationship/kinship
-ise (direct possession)	whose
i se/i savau *ira i savau* (pl)	who
nansa	when
nui i se (not edible) *nai i se* (edible)	whose
sava	what
sava-	what part
sei ia sava/sei na sava	for what
toma	what happen
mo vsa (irrealis) *ta vsa* (realis)	how many

(197)   *Ø   ta   va   <u>avea?</u>*
          3   R   go   where
          'Where does he go?'

(198)   *Ko   ta   minin   <u>ave-nie?</u>*
          2   R   want   which
          'Which one do you want?'

(199)   *Ko   sa   <u>nansa?</u>*
          2   go.up   when
          'When will you ascend?'

(200)   *<u>I   se</u>   Ø   ta   voro?*
          A:P   who   3   R   leave
          'Who left?'

(201) *I   Pita   natu-ise?*
      A:C   Peter   son-who
      'Whose son is Peter?'

(202) *I   Pita   i   sava-m*
      A:C   Peter   A:P   who-2
      'What kin is Peter to you?'

(203) *Ko rao ia   votal   mo   vsa?*
      2   take A:C banana   IRR   how.many
      'How many bananas may you take?'

(204) *Ko toma?*
      2   what.happen
      'What happened to you?'

(205) *Ko ta rao ia   jip   sei ia sava?*
      2   R   take A:C knife   for A:C what
      'Why do you take the knife?'

7   *Complex sentences*

The overall complex sentence structure involves embedding and juxtaposition, with a few subordinate connectives in the dependent clause. Complex sentence structure is somewhat simpler in complement clauses, quotations, and coordination than in dependent clause structures, where they have to be linked with connectives.

7.1 Complement clauses

Complement clauses are embedded in the 'object' slot, following the main verb (see §4.1), which is usually a verb of cognition or speaking which allows a complement clause. The embedded 'object' can be a proposition or question. There is a pause before the subordinate clause to distinguish it from a relative clause, in which the pause is after the noun being relativised and the stress is on the noun. The person and modality of the verb in the subordinate clause is independent from the main verb.

(206)   *Nam ta   rion/ ia   leito   Ø   ta   sa-ma*.
       1   R   see   A:C truck 3   R   go.up-return
       'I saw the truck come.'

(207)   *Kam ta   usi   ko   arongo/ ko   sio   peser i   gamau tui*.
       2P   R   ask   2   today   2   down   with   A:P 1E   PER
       'We asked you today for you to stay with us.

(208)   *Nam   tei   tauin /ise   Ø   ta   rao   ia   toa*.
       1   NEG   know   who   3   R   take A:C chicken
       'I didn't know who took the chicken.'

The use of the particle *vai* 'if' in the complement clause seems to indicate uncertainty.

(209)   *Nam   tei   tauin vai I   nie ia   tija   e   merei.*
       1   NEG   know   if   A:P 3   A:C teacher or   no
       'I don't know if he is a teacher or not.'

(210)   *Nam tei   tauin   i   nie ia   tija.*
       1   NEG   know   A:P 3   A:C teacher
       'I don't know that he is a teacher.'

7.2 Quotation

The structure of both direct and indirect quotations is similar to complement constructions. There has to be a pause before the quotation to distinguish direct quotation from indirect quotation. In addition both direct and indirect quotations can take an optional inalienable complementiser *tale-* 'speech', which does not take an article, to introduce the quotation. The optional particle *nga* after *tale-* shows that the quotation is direct. Direct quotation seems to be more common.

(211) *Tale-i   Jeremiah   a   voro.*
       speech-A:P Jeremiah   PSP.3   leave
       'Jeremiah's saying is, "He will leave".'

(212) *I Jeremiah Ø   ta   varai   tale-na,   na   voro.*
       A:P Jeremiah 3   R   say   speech-3   1   leave
       'Jeremiah said, "I will leave."'

(213) *Nam ta   varai   tale-gu,   Na   voro.*
       1   R   say   speech-1   1   leave
       'I said, "I will leave."'

(214) *I   Jeremiah, tale-na   nga   a   voro*
       A:P   Jeremiah   speech-3   only   PSP.3   leave
       'Jeremiah, his saying is "He will leave."'

7.3 Coordinate clauses and serial clauses

Juxtaposition is used extensively to coordinate clauses.

(215) *Nam ta tai   ia   jingo-m   ko   ta   tai   ia   sala-gu.*
       1   R   make   A:C   mouth-2   2   R   make   A:C road-1
       'I make your mouth and you make my road.' (from a legend)

(216) *Kama jen   ia   nou-m   varavara   a   vana   la   lue-mau*
       1E   change A:C   POSS-2 talk   PSP.3   come   L/T   language-1E
       'We translate Your word (Bible) into our language.' (in a prayer)

Simple juxtaposition can also apply to serial or sequential clauses, with pauses between them. However, an optional connective, e.g. *maga* 'after' or *madia* 'before', can emphasise the difference in timing.

(217) *Ia   batu-gu ta vasis, nam gogo al   meresin.*
       A:C   head-1 R pain   1   drink A:NF   medicine
       'When I have headache, I will take medicine.'

(218) *Nam ta   jip, (maga)   nam ta an.*
       1   R   cut   (after) 1   R   eat
       'I cut, (then) I eat.'

The disjunctive *e* 'or' may be inserted between two clauses. It is used in questions expressing alternatives.

(219)   *Nam   vai   e   ko   vai?*
        1   do   or   2   do
        'Will I do (it) or will you do (it)?'

7.4 Dependent clauses

7.4.1 Manner

The manner clause could be analysed as a dependent clause, introduced by *balein* 'just like', which occurs after the main clause. Note than *balein* can also be a verb, e.g. *ta balein*, 'it is the same.' Thus the structure is like an embedded clause or complement clause.

(220)   *Ia   natu   i   Pita   ta   aliali   balein   i   Pita   (ta   aliali).*
        the   son   POSS   Peter   R   walk   like   A:C   Peter   R   walk
        'Peter's son walks like Peter walks.'

(221)   *I nie ta   aliali   balein ia   hos   ta   kil.*
        he   R   walk   like   A:C   horse   R   run
        'He walks like the horse runs.'

(222)   *Ko   vai   balein.*
        2   make   like
        'You do the same thing.'

7.4.2 Purpose

The purpose clause can be analysed as a dependent clause, introduced by *'sei-na'*, which follows the main clause to state a purpose. Thus:

(223)   *Ko   ta   viris   sei-na   vaduvadu   ia   sna.*
        2   R   squeeze   for-3   cook   A:C   yam
        'You squeezed (coconut milk) to cook the yam.'

(224)   *Ko   ta   viris   sei   ia   manailarai.*
        2   R   squeeze   for   A:C   pudding
        'You squeezed (coconut milk) for pudding.'

(225)   *Nam   ta   vai   vogovogo-in   ia   sala   sei-na   leito   a*
        1   R   make   clean-OD   A:C   road   for-3   truck   PSP.3

        kil   abuabukara.
        run   fast
        'I clean the road in order that the truck will go fast.'

(225)   *Nam   ta   skul   to   sei   ia   susui   ia   tapsava.*
        1   R   school   IMP.INTR   for   A:C   learn   A:C   thing
        'I am going to school for learning something.'

7.4.3 Reason

To show reason the independent clause is joined with the subordinate clause by *belei-na* 'because'. The subordinate clause can be put before or after the independent clause. The fronting may be an emphatic device.

(227) *Nam tei va lolosop belei-na ia bei ta kara.*
     1   NEG go bathe   because-3 A:C water R red
     'I didn't go bathe because the water is dirty.'

The form *belei-* can also operate as a preposition with a nominal argument instead of a clause (see §5.3.1).

(228) *Nam tei bai va lolosop belei ia usa.*
     1   NEG able go bathe because A:C rain
     'I cannot go bathe because of the rain.'

7.4.4 Conditional

To add a conditional clause, a particle *vai* is usually put in front of the main clause, and the dependent clause has to use the irrealis mood. There is no structural difference between simple, hypothetical and contrafactual conditional clauses. The order of the clauses can be changed, but usually the clause in focus occurs first, as in (229). Thus:

(229) *Rabui-m mo tel ko, vai ko tei mini ta vauma.*
     mother-2 IRR.3 whip you if 2 NEG want R work
     'Your mother will whip you if you don't want to work.'

(230) *Vai ko tei mini ta vauma, rabui-m mo tel ko.*
     if 2 NEG want R work mother-2 IRR.3 whip you
     'If you don't want to work, your mother may whip you.'

(231) *Vai i nau Jeremiah, a sioto Hong Kong nga.*
     if AP 1 Jeremiah PSP.3 stay Hong Kong only
     'If I was Jeremiah, I would stay Hong Kong only.'

(232) *Vai Nam rion tei ia tese ta bulen ia nou-m*
     if 1 see PERF.TR A:C man R steal A:C POSSC.I-2

     vatu, nam ta varai tei asi-m-um
     money 1 R talk PERF.T DAT-2-AP
     'If I had seen the man stealing your money, I would have already told you.'

(233) *Vai mo tei vana tau, na voro.*
     if IRR.3 NEG come finish 1 leave
     'Before he comes, I will leave.'

The use of *nga* 'only' shows contrast. Thus:

(234)   *Nam ta   minin na sigoru nga,   vai mo   usa,   na sigoru*
       1   R   want   1   play   only   if   IRR.3 rain   1   play

       to   nga.
       IMP.INTR only

       'I just want to play, even if it rains, I will still play.'

8 *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the grammar has been described using a structural approach. Some of the typical features of the language have been highlighted and compared with some other Austronesian languages and protolanguages. However, the comparison is not in depth.

The data oriented approach can be objective provided that the collected data are accurate and the corpus well represents the language in different domains. However, the generative power of the language may be ignored and the recursiveness of the syntactic structure may not be well handled in this approach. The treatment of the function of clitics is not fully adequate due to lack of data. The discussion of the question words is limited to description.

8.1 A thread of categories

Some features found during the process of categorising different syntactic components deserve to be highlighted. The verbalisation of nouns, nominalisation of verbs (see §3.3), nominal modifying through the stative clauses and the combination of nouns and verbs (see §3.5 and §3.6) seem to suggest that the grammatical categories of the Merei language are not clear-cut syntactically in some situations.

Aside from the one adjective, nominal modifying can be carried out by both adjectival-nouns or adjectival-verbs. If the verb tends to be more noun-like or the noun tends to be more verb-like, it also tends to be more modifier-like. The multiple functions of the prepositions (see §5.3.1) and the transitivity-sensitive aspect markers (see §4.2.5), which can have the same distribution as the second verb in a serial verb construction, might suggest grammaticalisation between these grammatical elements and the basic word classes of noun and verb. There seems to be a thread connecting all these categories.

The question words seem to be problematic for categorisation but they also reflect a natural way to categorise based on semantic rather than grammatical criteria. They reflect a semantic or lexical significance in the study of syntax and may suggest another direction for the further study of this language.

8.2 Typical Oceanic

There is no doubt that Merei should be classified as an Oceanic language. The pronominal system and nominal modifying with limited adjective and possessive structures shows that Merei language is typical Oceanic. Verb serialisation and the structure of complex sentences and relative clauses are other typical Oceanic features.

The closeness to Proto Austronesian structures may reflect the fact that the language has had relatively little influence from other languages. In other words, the language seems to have remained quite stable. The Merei language group has been quite isolated from other, non-inland language groups. Thus, I wonder if even more Proto Oceanic features have been preserved than those discussed in this work.

8.3 Eastern Oceanic or Western Oceanic

Merei's basic clause construction fits well the Proto Eastern Oceanic language verbal clause formula (Pawley 1972:39). Merei (under the name Lametin) has been classified as the Eastern Oceanic language, but there is not enough evidence for that hypothesis (Pawley & Ross 1993:439–440). In addition, the absence of contrast between long and short vowels within morpheme boundaries (see §2.2) and the morphology of the adjective with a third person pronominal suffix (cf. §3.5) are features of Western Oceanic languages (Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002).

8.4 Central Vanuatu or Northern Vanuatu

Merei (under the name Lametin) has been classified as a member of the West Santo group of North Central Vanuatu languages (Wurm 1994:135; Gordon, R.G. Jr. 2005; Tryon 1994: Part I, Fascicle I:22–27, see also §1.5). There seems no strong evidence for classifying it as either North or Central Vanuatu. However, Merei is unlike the central languages in the number of noun classes, the neighbouring languages having more classes (Tryon 1973: 311–314). The verbal morphology is similar to that of the group of the extreme North, except the alternation between realis and irrealis (329–331). The verbal morphology and verb phrase syntax is relatively simple compared with other languages of the central subgroup.

The quinary numeral system is similar to that of the major languages in Espiritu Santo and Northern Vanuatu (Tryon 1973:323–324). Thus Merei more likely belongs to the Northern Vanuatu subgroup rather than the Central Vanuatu-subgroup.

8.5 Last words

This is merely a descriptive grammar, so nothing about the comparative study or classification can be conclusive. As I wrote this paper I also realised that I don't know as much about Merei language as I thought. I also discovered my limitations in linguistics theory, which should go hand in hand with descriptive linguistics. The study of languages is exciting but awesome.

Appendix 1: Sample text

Background

The following text (text no. 6 in Appendix 2) is a story told by Erikson, a male of about sixty years old, in Navele village in central Espiritu Santo. A portion of the story was sung by the narrator. It is typical to have singing insertion inside the story. However, the song was not sung in Merei but an unknown language. The zero morpheme and the transitivity of the aspect markers is not marked in this text.

Text: A story of two children and two spirits

1 *Tuai   ya   marakir   ta rua peseri   tama-ra   ireruvai*
   long.time.ago A:C   young.child R   two ACC/INST   father.ref-3P and

   rabui-ra   tato sio   to   la   vuivora ta ese.
   mother-3P   R.3P down   IMP   L/T place   R   name
   'Long time ago, two children with their parents stayed in one village.'

2 *Tato sio-to   sio-to   sio-to   tato vai   ya   anian taese ya*
   R.3P down-IMP   down-IMP   down-IMP   R.3P make   A:C   food   one   A:C

   ese-na   ya   jeli.
   name-3s   A:C   dance.ko
   'When they were staying, they made a feast. The name of the feast was jeli.'

3 *Tato   va   jeli.*
   R.3P   go   dance.ko
   'They went to the dancing feast.'

4 *Atei   ta   alial tau   vuivora nona lepne.*
   PSP.3.NEG   PL   walk   PERF   place   his   woman
   'They had not walked to the place of the man's wife.'

5 *'I   gami rau   marakir   kamara ono   to,   i   gamau rau*
    A:P 1E   two   young.child 1DE   inhabit IMP   A:P   1E   two

   kamara va-in.'
   1DE   go-TRAN
   '"You two children, you stay here. We two will go there."'

6   *Tale-ra   yarau marakir   i   gami kam mle   va   to.*
       speech-3P both   young.child   A:P   2P   2P   leave   go   IMP
       'Two children said, "You may leave us and go."'

7   *Tara   sio-to   sio-to   sio-to   sio-to   ya   ese   ya   tese*
       R.3D   down-IMP down-IMP down-IMP down-IMP A:C   name   A:C   man

       ta   ese   i   taulibosi   i   bululaiyam.
       R   name A:P Taulibosi   A:P   bululaiyam
       'While they were staying, there appeared one who is called Taulibosi with Bululaiyam.'

8   *Tei   tara   vuvut vana   tale-ra   i   gami rau   ya   marakir   i   gamau*
       and   R.3D truly   come   speech-3P A:P 2P   two   A:C   young.child A:P   1E

       kamara minin tei   la   va   tuluan.
       1DE   want   and   L/T   go   food.feast
       'Then, they arrived and said, "You two children, we want to go to the feast."'

9   *Tale-ra   kamara ta   minin   tei   i   tama-mau   rabui-mau   tara*
       speech-3P 1DE   R   want   PERF A:P   father.ref-1E mother-1E   R.3D

       varai ore   i   gamau.
       tell   obstacle   A:P   1E
       'They said, "We want to but our father and mother prohibited us."'

10   *Tale-ra   kamra   tei   minin vai   i   de   va.*
       speech-3P 2d   PERF   want   make   A:P   1I   go
       'They said, "Don't you want all of us go together."'

11   *Tale-ra   kamara ta   minin   tei.*
       speech-3P 1DE   R   want   PERF
       'They replied, "We want."'

12   *Tei   taptua   ta   rau   i   taptua   ta   mle   ta ju   marakir   ta*
       and   some.one   R   two   A:P some.one   R   leave   R   let   young.child R

       ju   la   manaivulna.
       let   L/T hair.on.head
       'Then, each one took one up, put the child in his hair.'

13   *Getua   balein.*
       here   same
       'Like here.' (the narrator was illustrating)

14   *Tei   tato   va   tau   vuvut   va   tato   va   bet   tato   bolo   to.*
       and   R.3P go   PERF   appear go   R.3P go   dance   R.3P sing   IMP
       'Then, they arrived, they danced and they sang.'

15   *Tato   jeli   tato   bolo   bolo   tato   bet   ta   ran   varage.*
       R.3P   dance.ko R.3P sing   sing   R.3P dance R   day   go.side
       'They had the dancing feast, they were dancing, the daylight departed.'

16   *Lai   rau   marakir   tara   varai tau   mle   to   mna.*
       now   two   young.child R.3D   tell   back   leave   IMP   very
       'Now, two children really cried for going home.'

17 *Ve   lai   ese-m   ise?*
SONG.M   now   name-2s   who
'They sang as "Now, what is your name?"'

18 *Lai ese-m taulibosi tomle   Mle   ya   ran   tomle,*
now   name-2s Taulibosi go.home leave A:C day go.home
'Now, your name is Taulibosi. Go home! Leave, the day is going home.'

19 *Mle   va   kirikiri   la   tomle,*
leave go very.small   L/T go.home
'Leave, it is going and leaving little by little.'

20 *Lai   ese-m   ise?*
now   name-2s   who
'They sang as "Now, what is your name?"'

21 *Lai   ese-m   bululaiyam tomle   Mle   ya   ran   tomle,*
now   name-2s bululaiyam go.home   leave A:C   day   go.home
'Now, your name is Bululaiyam. Go home! Leave, the day is going home.'

22 *Mle   va   kirikiri   la   tomle   tomle   mle   to*
leave   go very.small L/T go.home   go.home   leave IMP
'Leave, it is going and leaving little by little.'

23 *Tato tomle   tato varage, tato vuvut   varage   la   mal.*
R.3P go.side   R.3P appear   R.3P appear go.side L/T house.
'They went home, they departed and arrived the home.'

24 *Tara tau   vana   ju   sio   ya   rau   marakir,   tara   sangule sio*
R.3D   again   come   let   down A:C two   young.child R.3D   go.put   down

yarau   sei-bo.
both   piece-pig
'They put down two children and gave them two pieces of pork.'

25 *Tara   sio-to   nga.*
R.3D   down-IMP   just
'They just went down.'

26 *Tara   sio-to   sio-to,   i   tama-ra   i   rabui-ra tara tau*
R.3D   down-IMP   down-IMP   A:P father.ref-3P A:P mother-3P R.3D back

Vuvut   vana. Tale-ra   ya   rau   Marakir   kam   mle   ta   rao   ya-mi
appear   come   speech-3P A:C two   young.child 2P   leave R   take A:C-2pe

sei-bo   avea.
piece-pig   where
'When they were staying, their father and mother came back and said, "Two children, where did you get the pork?"'

27 *Tale-ra   kamara ta vana tau   leva la anian asi-mi i   gami kamra*
speech-3P 1DE   R   come PERF long L/T food   to-2pe A:P   2P   2P

tei   rion gamau, gamau rion kami tei.
not   see   1E   1E   see   2P   PERF

'They said, "We came back from the feast with you. You had not seen us, but we had seen you."'

28   *Gata   ta   soria.*
Here   R   last

'Here is the end.'

Appendix 2: Textual database details

Key for the source: t = tape; k = key in; hw = handwritten; l = letter; bk = notebook

No	Source	Narrator	Title/Content	File
1	t1a000–008	Rebecca	Making Pudding 1	text001.txt
2	t1a008–017	Rosemont	Making Pudding 2	text002.txt
3	t1a017–022	Joyce	Making Pudding 3	unclear
4	t1a022–044	Erickson	Pupuvla	text004.txt
5	t1a048–071	Peter	Ya tese ta ruva	text005.txt
6	t1a074–093	Erickson	A story of two children	text006.txt
7	t1a095–104	Nelson	Dum to dum to	text007.txt
8	t1a109–158	Chief John Mark	Origin of night	text008.txt
9	t1a159–205	Chief John Mark	History of the villages	text009.txt
10	t1a207–249	Chief John Mark	Story of two rivers	text010.txt
11	t1a253–377	Chief John Mark	History of Anglican Church	text011.txt
12	t1b001–019	Ana	Banyan Tree story	text012.txt
13	t1b023–085	George	Story of Vorese village	text013.txt
14	t1b085–395	People in Navele	Coversation in Nakamal	text014.txt
15	t2b000–015	Shadrack	Prayer for village and translation project	text015.txt
16	t2b015–045	Manuel Katalelel	Story of two good friends	text016.txt
17	t2b045–063	John Mark	Speech in Philip's wedding (1)	text017.txt
18	t2b063–099	Kere	Speech in Philip's wedding (2)	text018.txt
19	t2b099–119	??	Speech in Philip's wedding (3)	
20	t2b119–131	Johndi	Speech in Philip's wedding (4a)	
21	t2b131–193	Stephen	Questions for Merei RRT test	
22	t2b193–324	Johndi	Speech in Philip's wedding (4b)	
23	t3a001–577	George and Raf	Coversation of George and Raf	text023.txt
24	t3b001–013	Edmond	An old woman changed skin	text024.txt
25	t3b013–035	Edmond	Arip toro and Vakir	text025.txt
26	t3b035–066	Edmond	The eel fish of the lake	text026.txt
27	t3b066–578	Rebecca and Rose	Conversation of Rebecca and Rose	
28	t4a002–396	Rebecca and Rose	Conversation of Rebecca and Rose	text028.txt

No	Source	Narrator	Title/Content	File
29	t4b002–166	Rebecca and Rose	Conversation of Rebecca and Rose	text029.txt
30	t5a002–427	People from inland	Conversation on Chrsitmas Eve	
31	t5b002–093	People from inland	Conversation on the day after Christmas	
32	t6a002–035	Bunne	Vakir	
33	t6a035–049	Bunne	Rat and cat	
34	t6a049–078	Bunne	Dog and bat	
35	t6a078–113	Bunne	Man who cut the grass	
36	t6a113–122	Erickson	Song	
37	t6a122–137	Erickson	Song: sau saru sa e	
38	t6a137–390	Rebecca	In kitchen	
39	t6b002–023	Edmond	Story of fight between villa	
40	t6b023–034	Edmond	Story of trees	
41	t6b034–048	Edmond	Custom of marriage and funeral	
42	t6b048–058	Edmond	Custom of delivery baby	
43	t6b058–068	Edmond	Custom of shaving (rite of puberty for boy)	
44	t6b078–097	Edmond	Rite of puberty (girl)	
45	t6b097–112	Edmond	Custom healing	
46	t6b112–131	Edmond	Custom of funeral	
47	t6b132–396	Vustom/Navele people	Feast for farewell Simon	
48	t7a003–136	Rosemont and Tapsara	Conversation	
49	t7a140–390	Shadrack, David, Raf	Kava meeting (part 1)	
50	t7b001–390	Shadrack, David, Raf	Kava meeting (part 2)	
51	t8a001–013	William Dee	Tiale, Recorded Text Question	
52	t8a016–049	Manuel Lagrere	Life story of Manuel Lagrere	
53	t8a052–070	Manuel Lagrere	Education in Vanuatu	
54	t8a071–093	Manuel Lagrere	Shaving ceremony	
55	t8a093–139	Manuel Lagrere	Hunting	
56	t8a140–155	Johnsin	Daily life	
57	t8a159–170	Presly	Daily life	
58	t8a170–194	Julai	Talk with Jeremiah	
59	t8b319–362	Stephen	Question for RT Test (Tiale)	
60	t8b362–382	Chief Johndi	Question for RT Test (Tiale)	
61	t9a002–020	Shadrack	Prayer for translation daily	
62	t9a021–057	Shadrack	Teaching son (simulated)	
63	t9a057–118	Shadrack	Testimony	
64	t9a122–426	Rebecca and Bunne's Mum	Conversation in kitchen	
65	t9a427–442	Norman	Prayer	
66	t9a445–461	Raf, Erikson	Coconut scrapper	
67	t9a461–561	Rebecca, etc.	Converstiaon in Navele	

No	Source	Narrator	Title/Content	File
68	t9b-001–111	People of Navele	Working with copra	
69	t9b-111–288	Children of Navele	Watching photograph	
70	t9b-289–320	Manuel Lagrere	Growing coconuts	
71	t9b-320–362	Manuel Lagrere	Growing kava	
72	t9b-362–426	Manuel Lagrere	Raising cows	
73	t9a-427–472	Manuel Lagrere	Keeping pigs	
74	t9a-472–521	Manuel Lagrere	Keeping chickens	
75	t10a-001–058	Manuel Lagrere	Spirit and body	
76	t10a-059–301	Manuel Lagrere	Growing cocoa	
77	t10b-003–019	Erickson	A message to Loretta	
78	t11a-003–224	People of Espiritu Santo inland	Custom Dance on a feast	
79	t13a-001–572	People of Big Bay	Custom Dance on a feast (part 1)	
80	t13b-001–209	People of Big Bay	Custom Dance on a feast (part 2)	
81	t13b-209–265	People of Big Bay	Contemporary youth music	
82	t12a-001–013	People in Nakamal, Navele	Conversation	
83	t12a-013–102	Chief John Mark	Funeral rite	text083.txt
84	t12a-111–121	Chief Frank	Feast	text084.txt
85	t14a-002–157	Stephen	Minimal pair (part 2)	
86	k1	William Dee	Story of crab and fish (Tiale)	
87	k2	Shadrack	Story of crab and fish (Merei)	text087.txt
88	k3	William Dee	Story of crab and rat (Tiale)	
89	k4	Shadrack	Story of crab and rat (Merei)	text089.txt
90	l1-11-11-96	Norman	A letter to Manuel Peter	text090.txt
91	l2-24-4-97	Norman	A letter to Jeremiah (project report)	
92	l3-11-5-97	Norman	A letter to Jeremiah (literacy course)	
93	l4-7-6-97	Norman	Literacy course report	
94	l5-12-8-97	Norman	Project report	
95	l6-24-2-98	Norman	Big Bay situation	
96	hw1-22-11-97	Norman	Today's story	text096.txt
97	hw2-22-11-97	Norman	A ghost who killed many	text097.txt
98	hw3-22-11-97	Norman	How to build a house	text098.txt
99	bk1a	Big Bay people	Miscellaneous	
100	bk1b	Big Bay people	Miscellaneous	
101	bk2	Big Bay people	Miscellaneous	

Appendix 3: Comparative word lists

The following is a word list comparing Lametin, Merei and Tiale. The items of the word lists and the Lametin list are a modification based on the word list in Tryon (1976:175–539). The Merei and Tiale lists were collected by the author and Jim Stahl in 1996.

No	Gloss	Lametin	Merei	Tiale
1	head	ᵐbatu	ᵐbat	ᵐbat
2	hair	manai̯ᵦul̯	manaivul	manaivul
3	ear	ᵐboro̜	ᵐboro	ᵐboro
4	nose	nalsu̜	ŋasu	asu
5	tongue	meme̜	meme	meme
6	tooth	uⁿdʳu̜	uⁿdu	aⁿgo
7	eye	mata̯	mata	mata
8	mouth	tʃiŋo̜	tsinŋo	tsiŋo
9	beard	ᵦulese̜	vulese	vulese
10	chin	ese̜	ese	ese
11	shoulder	ᵐbil̯i̯	ᵐbil	ᵐbili
12	upper arm		wuilmaⁿd	vuima
13	hand	lima̯	lma	liman
14	thumb		ᵐbisᵐbo	bisᵐbo
15	neck	ⁿdʳalo̜	ⁿdolo	gonon
16	breasts	susu̜	susu	susu
17	rib	roro̜	roro	ronro
18	belly	tia̯	tia	taᵐbele
19	guts	manaita̯l̯	tali	tali
20	heart	maᵦsonputu̯i̯	mapso	mapson
21	liver	maᵐbe̜	maᵐbe	maᵐbe
22	navel	ᵐbuto̜	ᵐbuto	ᵐbuto
23	kidney	ᵦatʃowa̯	vatsova	vajeva
24	body hair	vul̯	vulu	
25	penis	ᵑgala̯		
26	testicles	lasa̯		
27	vulva	tʃiri̯		
28	back	tau̯	tau	tau

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No	Gloss	Lametin	Merei	Tiale
29	right (hand)	aⁿdʳiaⁿdʳi̱	aⁿdiaⁿdi	agiagi
30	left (hand)	marau̯	marau	marau
31	lungs		maᵐberau̯	maberau
32	excrement	morte̱	morte	morte
33	vein	ɣaras̱	karavot	karavot
34	thigh	βeselaᵐbai̯	veselaᵐbai	veselamᵐbai
35	knee	ᵐbau̯	ᵐbau	ᵐbau
36	leg			vese
37	ankle	naᵐbolra̱	ᵐbau	ᵐbalorailima
38	heel	tuᵐbaᵑga̱	tuᵐbaŋŋa	ᵐbaloraisari
39	foot		vese	sari
40	blood	ⁿdʳae̱	ⁿdai	gae
41	bone	sui̱	sui	sui
42	skin	uru̱r	uru	ururi
43	sore(n)	maⁿdʳamasⁿdʳa	maⁿdamaⁿda	loloiesari
44	fat(n)	manaiaṟ	ar	ari
45	sweat	manŋis	manŋis	valalaja
46	tears	ᵐbeinmata̱	ᵐbeimata	ᵐbeimata
47	father	tama̱	tama	tama
48	mother	raᵐbui̯	raᵐbui	raᵐbui
49	child	na̱t	nat	nat
50	man	tauⁿdʳu	taundu	taugu
51	woman	lepne	lepne/lepme	levine
52	husband		tauⁿdu	taugu
53	name	ese̱	ese	ese
54	person		tese	tese
55	wife		lepne	lepne
56	uncle (gen.)	ᵐbapne̱	yeluwaitamana/tama	saᵐbe
57	uncle (mat.)		meme/saᵐbe	meme
58	singsing	ᵐbolo	ᵐbolo	ᵐbolo
59	house	mal	mal	eima
60	men's house	mal	maliyadulvou	eimalatulvo
61	door	tʃiŋoimal	tsinŋoimal	jinoiima
62	story	ululβara	ulultui/ululvara	ululvaravara
63	pig	ᵐbo	ᵐbo	ᵐbo
64	tusk	uⁿdui	uⁿdui	ugui
65	centipede			
66	crayfish		riŋ	ura
67	dog	ᵐbes	pes	ᵐbes
68	louse	ut	ut	utu
69	fly	laŋ	lanŋo	lano
70	snake	marta	marta	marita

No	Gloss	Lametin	Merei	Tiale
71	egg	slẹ	slei	sle
72	bird	mano	manno	mano
73	animal	saravat	saravat	
74	mosquito	tʃiŋo	tsinŋo	mosti
75	fish	mantʃi	matsi	maji
76	squid			
77	rat	ariβ	arif	arip
78	shark			
79	whale			
80	stingray			
81	butterfly	ᵐbeᵐbe	ᵐbeᵐbe	ᵐbeᵐbe
82	wing	rarạ	rara	rara
83	ant	ⁿdʳiuⁿdʳiu	ⁿduiⁿdui	guigui / agi
84	flying fox	ᵑgarai	garai	garai
85	dolphin			
86	grasshopper	ⁿdʳui	ⁿdui	egui
87	scorpion	taᵐba	taᵐba	taᵐba
88	seasnake			
89	starfish		yeviselatas	evitumaji
90	tail	βiⁿdʳị	viⁿdi	vigi
91	turtle		vua	vua
92	spider web	ᵐbara	tatalbara	tatannuiᵐbara
93	biche de mer			
94	feather		vul	vulu
95	meat	masao	masau/viso	viso
96	food	aniani	annian	anian
97	yam	sna	sna	sina
98	taro	ᵐbeta	ᵐbeta	ᵐbeta
99	sugar cane	toβ	top	top
100	sago		ᵐbiyo	biyo
101	almond		vonai/foŋai	vonai
102	tree	ao	yarau/pmau	vuiyau
103	leaf	rau	manairau	manairau
104	arrowroot			
105	dry coconut	matui	matui gor	matuigoru
106	coconut palm		matui	matui
107	banana	βotal	votal	votal
108	breadfruit	lep	lep	lip
109	black palm		matas	malavo
110	sandalwood		marovo/ᵐbioro	mrovo
111	flower	βsoiau	vsuiyau	wusoiyau
112	fruit	βona	vona	vona

No	Gloss	Lametin	Merei	Tiale
113	grass	^{m}balis	^{m}balis	^{m}balis
114	root	ora	ora	oraiyau
115	woods	^{n}d^{r}uluau	la^{n}duluau	tavaiam^{m}bu
116	sun	mataimasa	mataimasa	mataemasa
117	moon	βla	vla	vla
118	star	βit	vit	vitu
119	cloud	^{n}d^{r}o^{n}d^{r}o	lo^{m}bolo^{m}bo	lo^{m}bolo^{m}bo
120	water	^{m}bei	^{m}bei	^{m}bei
121	rain	usa	usa	usa
122	river	^{m}bei	bei	
123	sand	^{m}bonaiβus	^{m}bonaivus	^{m}bonaivus
124	stone	sule	sule	^{m}bule
125	salt		manaisolo	solo
126	mountain	^{m}batβut	^{m}batfut	^{m}bavut
127	fire	moria^{m}bu	moria^{m}bu	moria^{m}bu
128	smoke	asu	asu	easu
129	ashes	morβsoa	^{m}batmorsoa	morsoa
130	road	sal	sala	sala
131	wind	sisil	sisil	sisil
132	lighting	βilei	vilei/jirekara	vileivilei
133	rainbow	raβeraβemaraɣ	raveravemarakara	la^{m}beimara
134	earth	morβtano	movortanno	movotano
135	earthquake	mui	mui	mui
136	hole	^{m}ba^{m}ba	^{m}bua	vunu^{m}bua
137	thunder	^{m}biriŋ	^{m}biriŋ	^{m}birin
138	fog	lo^{m}bolo^{m}bo	lo^{m}bolo^{m}bo	lo^{m}bolo^{m}bo
139	lake		tu^{m}bu/lamma/paloai	lama
140	sea	tas	tas	tas
141	seed	^{m}bir	^{m}bir	^{m}birina
142	sky		lanŋot	tuga
143	stick	βuiau	wuiau/tavaiyau	tavaiyau
144	firewood	βuia^{m}bu	tavaia^{m}bu	tavaia^{m}bu
145	mud	^{ŋ}gama^{ŋ}gama	manaile^{m}ba	manaieva
146	wave		tarulum/susun	rulum
147	foam		manaivalvalna/falfal	manaivalvalna
148	canoe			
149	paddle			
150	anchor			
151	outrigger			
152	sail			
153	dust		manaifsoa/vusivusi	banaivus
154	rope	βuias	vuiyas	vuiyas

No	Gloss	Lametin	Merei	Tiale
155	bow	^{m}bipna	^{m}bipna	lie
156	arrow	matai^{m}bati^{m}bna	^{m}batipna	^{m}batvina
157	knife	tʃip	jip/jif	jivi
158	axe	tʃaeŋk	jaeke	jaeke
159	digging stick	oraβsa	wuivaiyel	vuivaiel
160	hook		wuiyauko	vuiyauko
161	spear		mawua	mavua
162	earth oven	napnamoru	mamoru	vunamoru
163	fight(n)	βuro	tato^{n}dum/tato^{n}dum^{n}du	taragum
164	black		^{m}boŋ^{m}boŋtu^{m}b	^{m}boŋ^{m}boŋ
165	white	βso	vso	uso
166	red	^{ŋ}gar	kara	kara
167	yellow	mantʃina	majinna	majina
168	green	entʃa	^{m}baro^{m}baro	^{m}baro^{m}baro
169	blind	mataβso	mata^{n}donto	matanvuso
170	deaf	^{m}boroβono	^{m}borovonno	^{m}borovono
171	big	torona	toronna	tala^{m}ba
172	small	taʔ^{ŋ}gir	takir	kirekire
173	good	mamasa	mamasa	mamasa
174	bad	lo^{ŋ}golo^{ŋ}go	lo^{ŋ}golo^{ŋ}go	lokoloko
175	cooked	ma^{n}d^{r}a	ma^{n}da	mejo
176	dead	mate	mate	mate
177	dry	^{ŋ}gor	goru	goru
178	wet	me^{n}d^{r}ime^{n}d^{r}iŋ	menme^{n}din	menmegin
179	lazy	siok	sioko	sioka
180	heavy	^{m}buruŋa	^{m}bunŋa	^{m}buvet
181	light	sasal	sasale	ran
182	sick	rotʃ	rojo/rotʃo	rojo
183	cold	marih	maril	kovokovoso
184	dirty	marou	manaija	manaija
185	dull	nol		
186	long	^{m}barap	^{m}barap	^{m}barap
187	narrow		takir	takirekire
188	new	βuaβun	vavun	vavun
189	old	βarese	βarese	varese
190	right (correct)	mamasa	^{m}bos/mamasa	^{m}bos/mamasa
191	rotten	nut	nut	jira
192	sharp	mat	mat	mat
193	short	^{m}but	^{m}but	va^{m}but
194	smooth	malamala	malamala	kamalamalas
195	straight		^{m}bos	bos
196	thick		^{m}blo^{m}blono	blono

No	Gloss	Lametin	Merei	Tiale
197	thin		seiseina	seina
198	wide		jia	laba
199	one	ese	ese	ese
200	two	rua	ruwa	ruva
201	three	tolu	tolu	tolu
202	four	ßat	vat	vat
203	five	lima	lima	lima
204	six	limaraßu	maravo	maravo
205	seven	raßrua	ravorua	ravorua
206	eight	raptolu	raptol	raptol
207	nine	raitat	raetat	raetat
208	ten	saŋaßul	sanŋaful	sannalvul
209	few		esese	esese
210	other	taʔanono	nono	nono
211	some		falsuᵐbera	varsuᵐbera
212	who	ise	isavau/ise	savau
213	what	nasaʔu	sava	sava
214	when	lalai moßsa	nansa/annaŋsa	ananasa
215	how many	moßsa	mofsa/tafsa	tavisa
216	many	laßraena	morna	morina
217	where	aßea	avea	avea
218	work	ßauma	vauma	vauma
219	warm	ßarlentʃe	valetse/varvartun	varavaratun
220	yesterday	nanoß	ŋanannop	ananop
221	tomorrow	ßaßio	bavio	ᵐbavio
222	night	ᵐboŋ	ᵐboŋ	ᵐbon
223	year	taon	tauon	tauun
224	day	ran	ran	ran
225	I	inau	innau	inau
226	thou	iⁿgo	iŋo	igo
227	he	nie	nie	nie
228	we pl.inc	iⁿdʳe	iⁿde	igmau
229	we pl.exc	ŋgamauŋa	iŋammau	gamau
230	you pl.	ŋgam	iŋammi	gami
231	they	ire	ire	ire
232	we dl.inc.		iⁿderuwa	gerua
233	we dl.exc.		iŋamauruwa	gamaurua
234	you dl		iŋamiruwa	gamirua
235	they dl		ireruwa	irerua
236	give	ŋgure	gure	gurei
237	hit	ᵐbot	aᵐbot	tel
238	see	terion	taron	rion

No	Gloss	Lametin	Merei	Tiale
239	bite	at	at	tata
240	hear	roŋoin	ronŋoin	ronoiin
241	cry	ŋar	ŋara	tan
242	die	mate	mate	mate
243	vomit	lua	lua	luva
244	go	soβa	voro/va	voro
245	come	sioma	sioma/sama	sama
246	swim	ŋgaru	ŋgar	garu
247	eat	aniani	anian	anian
248	stand	turu	turu	tur
249	sit	taⁿdʳa	taⁿda	tasio
250	call out	ŋgele	kel	kel
251	run	ŋgil	kil	kil
252	fall	tʃop	jop	jovi
253	sleep	malaᵐbo	malaᵐbo	malaᵐbo
254	laugh	uru	uru	lisa
255	blow	sis	sis	sisi
256	hold	ŋkau	gau	gau
257	fly	sale	sale	sale
258	tie	βis	pes	pes
259	spit	loto	loto	loto
260	bark		ku	ku
261	breathe	ŋura	manŋamanŋa	manamana
262	burn	sului	sului	sului
263	count	ep	ep	viep
264	cut	teβei	tevei	teve
265	dig	eli	el	el
266	drink	ŋgoⁿgo	ŋgoⁿgo	gogo
267	fear	matau	matau	matau
268	float	sasale	sasale	sasale
269	flow	βra	vravra	uraura
270	hunt		jurpes	jurbes
271	kill	pti	raswum/pti	tailavum
272	know	taβuin	tauvin	tauvin
273	lie	kokono	kokono/mismis	tamismis
274	live		taᵐbei	pei
275	play	tasⁿgor	siŋoru	siŋoru
276	pull	tetlui	tlui	tului
277	push	tetani	susuren/tani	susuren
278	rub	mesmes	mes	mos
279	say	βarai	varavara	varavara
280	scratch	ŋgaruⁿgarum	ŋgarum	garum

No	Gloss	Lametin	Merei	Tiale
281	sew		tulu/tulatula	
282	sing	ᵐbole	ᵐbolo	ᵐbolo
283	smell	roŋᵐbonai	ᵐbonai/ŋuru	ᵐbonai
284	split	ᵐbosoβueβue	poso	poso
285	squeeze	βirisi	viris	man
286	stab	tui	tui/oti	oti
287	suck	ⁿdʳame	taim	im
288	swell	ᵐbure	ᵐbure	ᵐbure
289	think	ⁿdʳomⁿdʳom	ⁿdomⁿdom	gomgom
290	throw	plei	ᵐblei	ᵐblei
291	turn	ᵐborsen	ᵐborsin	porsen
292	walk	ruruai	ruruwai/aliali	aliali
293	wash	βariorione	losop	losop
294	wipe	tʃoia	mes	tatel
295	all		vonno/ire/vunvun	ire
296	and		peseri	tuen
297	at		la	la
298	because		paleina	palena
299	far		leva	levano
300	here		ketua	ketua
301	how		paleiniave	palenniave
302	if		vai	vai
303	in		laloloi	laloloi
304	near		tevui	tevui
305	not		merei	tiale
306	that		levanie	levanie
307	there		levannie	levanie
308	this		ketnie	ketnie
309	with		peseri	peseri

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