A verb, a noun, or an adjective?

On determining word classes in Wagiman and Vurës

Daniel Krauße

Linguistics
HDR Symposium
University of Newcastle

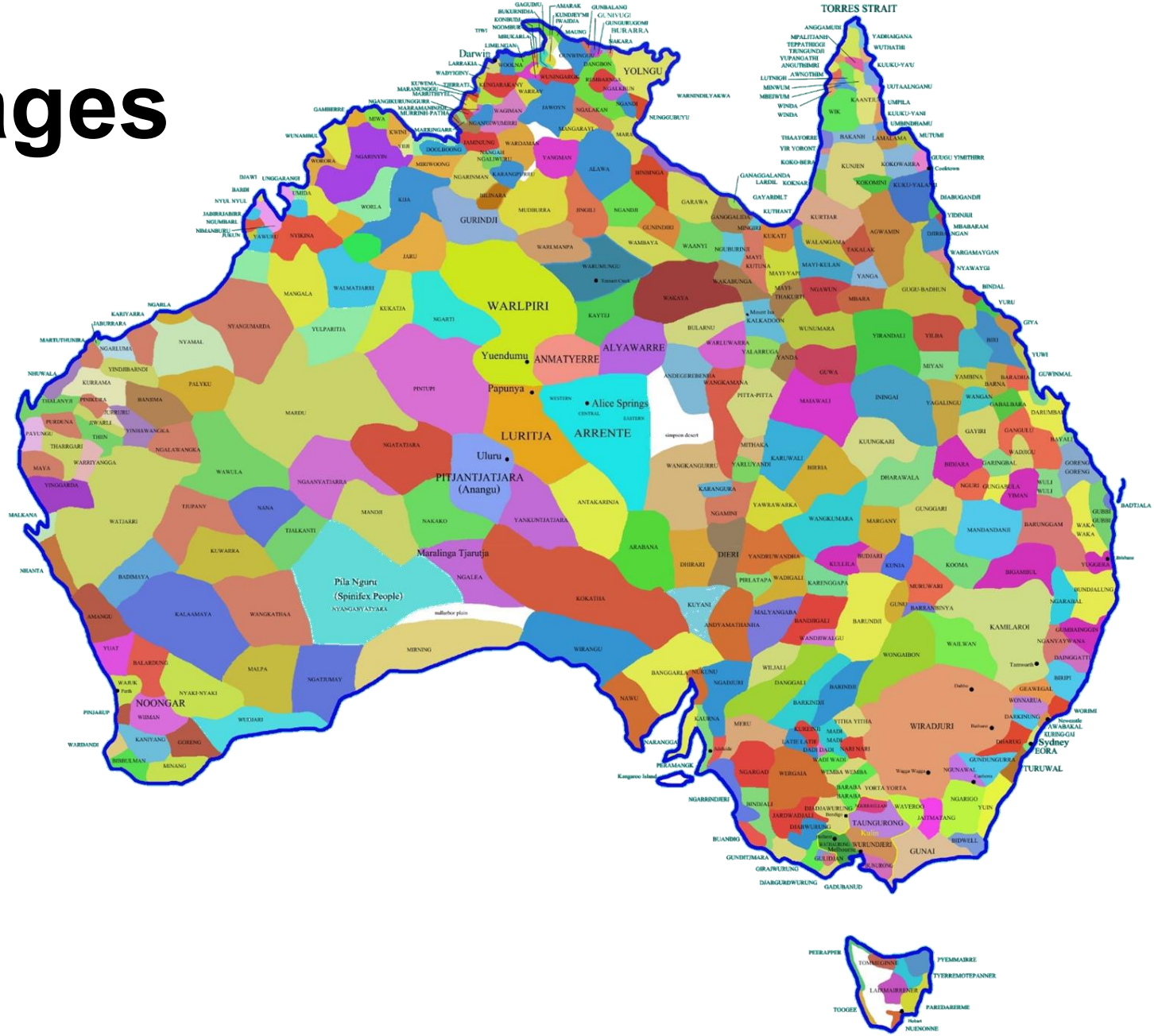
6 June 2018

Content

The Languages

Australian Languages

- at time of arrival of Europeans more than 300 languages/dialects in Australia
- today, only about half of them still spoken
- less than 20 languages still acquired by children
- probably form one genetic group with the ancestor Proto-Australian more than 10,000 years ago



Wagiman

- spoken near Pine Creek, 200 km south of Darwin, northern Australia

(based on Koch & Nordlinger 2014:xiv)

Wagiman

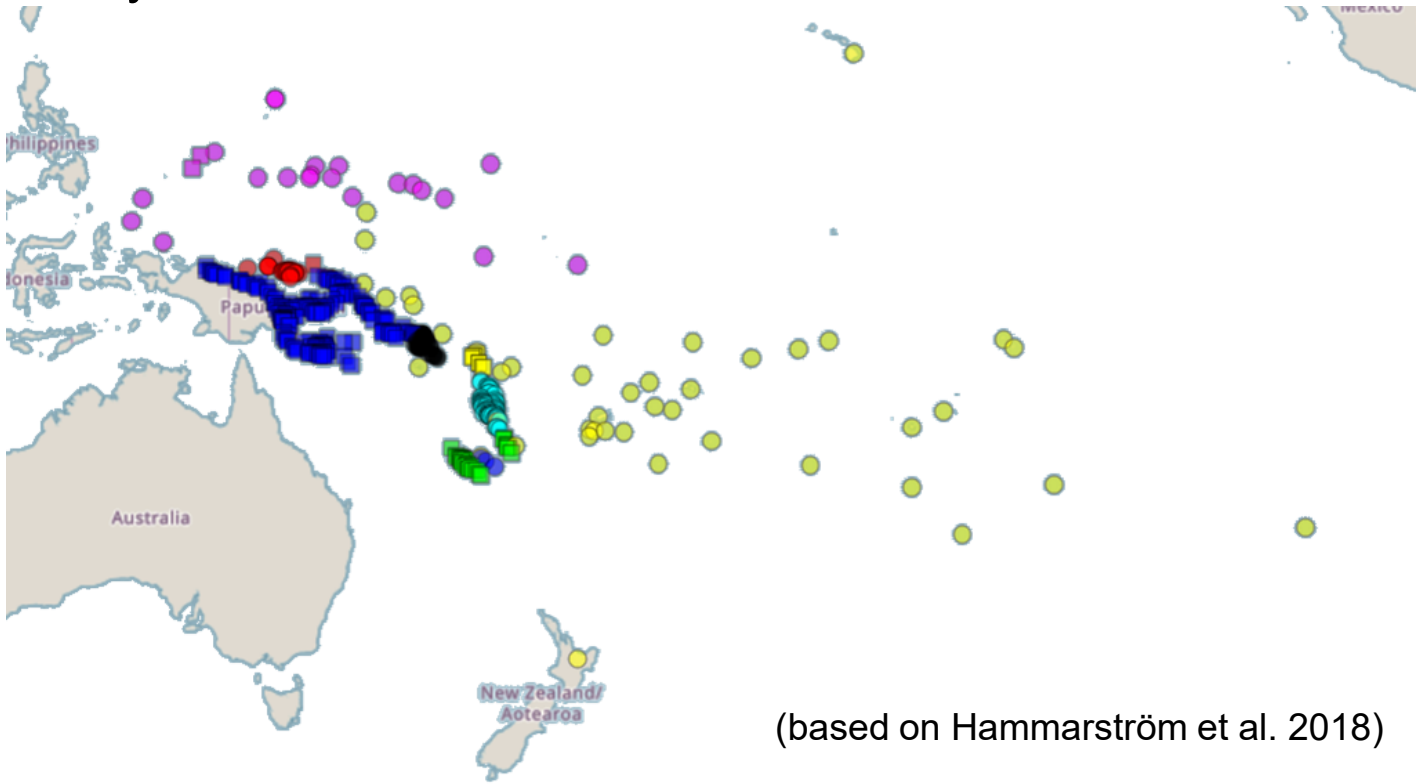
- language isolate (cannot be genetically linked to any other language)
- less than 5 speakers remain
- syntactically typical for northern Australian languages
- word order is free, but verb often at the end

(1) *Lagiban-yi* *jilimakkun* *Ø-jewo-ndi*
man-ERG woman 3>3PST-follow-PST.NPFV
'The man followed the woman.'

Jilimakkun lagibanyi jewondi.
Lagibanyi jewondi jilimakkun.
Jilimakkun jewondi lagibanyi.
Jewondi jilimakkun lagibanyi.

Oceanic Languages

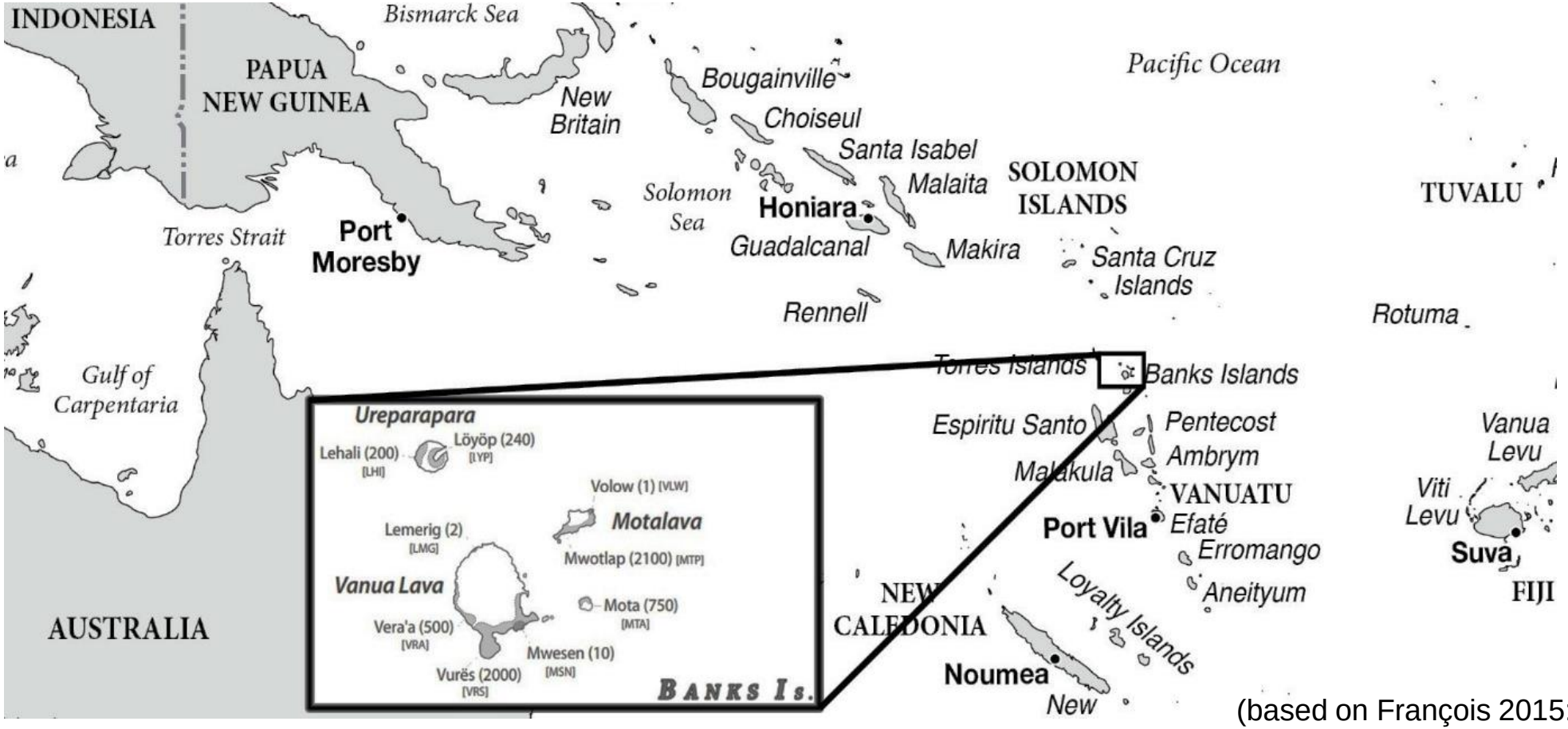
- part of the bigger Austronesian languages family (> 1200 languages)
- spoken in Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia
- there are ~500 Oceanic languages, many of them un-/underdescribed
- more than 100 in Vanuatu
- word classes often flexible



(based on Hammarström et al. 2018)

Vurës

- spoken on Vanua Lava in northernmost Vanuatu



(based on François 2015:143)

Vurës

- spoken by about 2,000 people, still learned by children
- syntactically typical for northern/central Vanuatu languages
- word order is fixed: subject-verb-object

(2) *O* *atmēn* *ma-tatag* *o* *reqe*
ART man PRF-follow ART woman
‘The man followed the woman.’

Word Classes

Defintion

- also called parts-of-speech (POS), lexical categories, or syntactic categories (Simone & Masine 2014:1)
- categorisation of words into various classes according to their morphosyntactic behaviour
- debate over word classes is as old as linguistics (Ancient Greek, Sanskrit, etc.)
- philosophers, logicians, and grammarians have tried to categorise the things in the world
- why do languages group words into word classes?
- are word classes comparable cross-linguistically? (cf. Haspelmath 2010:110)
- word classes are often language-specific

Open vs. closed class

- open class: new words can be added
- list of examples is endless:
  - **nouns**: dog, man, salt, table, zeitgeist, thingamajig, whatchamacallit, …
  - **verbs**: run, sit, die, zoom in, fax, sleepwalk, bamboozle, bumfuzzle, …
  - **adjectives**: red, dead, savvy, gung-ho, contumacious, rhadamanthine, …
  - **adverbs**: well, loudly, very, yesterday, certainly, intransigently, …
  - **interjections**: oh, hey, hello, psst, tsk-tsk, wow, thanks, …

Open vs. closed class

- open class: new words can be added
- list of examples is endless:
  - **nouns**: dog, man, salt, table, zeitgeist, thingamajig, whatchamacallit, …
  - **verbs**: run, sit, die, zoom in, fax, sleepwalk, bamboozle, bumfuzzle, …
  - **adjectives**: red, dead, savvy, gung-ho, contumacious, rhadamanthine, …
  - **adverbs**: well, loudly, very, yesterday, certainly, intransigently, …
  - **interjections**: oh, hey, hello, psst, tsk-tsk, wow, thanks, …
- many languages allow flexible word classes:
  - nouns: the run, the fax, the walking dead, child of yesterday

Open vs. closed class

- open class: new words can be added
- list of examples is endless:
  - **nouns**: dog, man, salt, table, zeitgeist, thingamajig, whatchamacallit, …
  - **verbs**: run, sit, die, zoom in, fax, sleepwalk, bamboozle, bumfuzzle, …
  - **adjectives**: red, dead, savvy, gung-ho, contumacious, rhadamanthine, …
  - **adverbs**: well, loudly, very, yesterday, certainly, intransigently, …
  - **interjections**: oh, hey, hello, psst, tsk-tsk, wow, thanks, …
- many languages allow flexible word classes:
  - nouns: the run, the fax, the walking dead, child of yesterday
  - verbs: they manned the ship; he tsk-tsked, they savvied what to do, …

Open vs. closed class

- open class: new words can be added
- list of examples is endless:
  - **nouns**: dog, man, salt, table, zeitgeist, thingamajig, whatchamacallit, …
  - **verbs**: run, sit, die, zoom in, fax, sleepwalk, bamboozle, bumfuzzle, …
  - **adjectives**: red, dead, savvy, gung-ho, contumacious, rhadamanthine, …
  - **adverbs**: well, loudly, very, yesterday, certainly, intransigently, …
  - **interjections**: oh, hey, hello, psst, tsk-tsk, wow, thanks, …
- many languages allow flexible word classes:
  - nouns: the run, the fax, the walking dead, child of yesterday
  - verbs: they manned the ship; he tsk-tsked, they savvied what to do, …
  - adjectives: salt beef, I'm well, a very woman, …

Open vs. closed class

- closed class: hardly any new words can be added; rarely borrowed
- list of examples is limited:
  - **adpositions**: in, from, by, to, under, throughout, ago, … (~150 in English)
  - **determiners**: the, a, an, this, those, some, all, no, …
  - **conjunctions**: and, because, or, unless, lest, whether, … (~50 in English)
  - **pronouns**: I, me, you, him, herself, each other, anyone, who … (~70 in English)
  - **numerals**: one, three, twelve, million, … (combinatory)
  - **auxiliary/modal verbs**: be, can, do, may, ought, … (~12 in English)

Features

- three possibilities how a word can appear in the lexicon:
  - may be a member of only one class, no possibility of derivation: *bandicoot*
  - its stem has a basic form and can be assigned to different word classes by derivation: *man*
  - its stem is a member of more than one word class: *walk*
- criteria to determine word classes depend on the language
- **nouns**: referential (my …, this …) and head a noun phrase
- **verbs**: predicational, head a verb phrase, and reference the time (go, went)
- **adjectives**: property roots, difficult to define cross-linguistically

The Case of Wagiman

Wagiman

(3) *G-i-**ya**=ngana* ***guk**-ka-y-ga* *lah-ga.*
PRS-1PL-**go**=INCL **sleep**-IPFV-LIG-ALL camp-ALL
'We are going to the camp to sleep.'

Wagiman

(3) *G-i-**ya**=ngana* *__guk__-ka-y-ga* *lah-ga.*
PRS-1PL-**go**=INCL **sleep**-IPFV-LIG-ALL camp-ALL
'We are going to the camp to sleep.'

- both *-ya-* 'go' and *guk-* 'sleep' are predicational (like verbs)

Wagiman

(3) *G-i-**ya**=ngana* ***guk**-ka-y-ga* *lah-ga.*
PRS-1PL-**go**=INCL **sleep**-IPFV-LIG-ALL camp-ALL
'We are going to the camp to sleep.'

- both *-ya-* 'go' and *guk-* 'sleep' are predicational (like verbs)
- both *guk-* 'sleep' and *lah-* 'camp' have the allative case marker (like nouns)
- is *guk-* a verb or a noun?

Wagiman

(4) *Mayh-laying* *g-a-ba-guk-ka-n* *nguynguy.*
here=LOC PRS-3-PL-**sleep**-VBZ-PRS night
'They are sleeping here tonight.'

Wagiman

(4) *Mayh-laying* *g-a-ba-guk-ka-n* *nguynguy.*
here=LOC PRS-3-PL-**sleep**-VBZ-PRS night
'They are sleeping here tonight.'

- *guk-* 'sleep' now receives all verbal markers because of the verbaliser
- it behaves like a verb, but it is not a 'real verb'
- what is it then?

Wagiman

(4) *Gahan* *marluga* *gomo* ***ngerrp****-pa* *Ø-**bu**-ni.*
that man rope **cut-**IPFV 3>3PST**-hit-**PST
'That man cut the rope apart.'

Wagiman

(4) *Gahan* *marluga* *gomo* ***ngerrp****-pa* *Ø-****bu****-ni.*
that man rope **cut-**IPFV 3>3PST**-hit-**PST
'That man cut the rope apart.'

- *ngerrp-* 'cut' has an imperfective marker as expected for verbs in other languages
- the clause already has a verb: *-bu-* 'hit'
- can we have two verbs in a clause?
- literally: *that man* ***hit*** *the rope* ***cutting*** *(it)*

Wagiman

- such words (with nominal and verbal features) are termed **coverbs** in Wagiman
- these constitute an **open class** (the list of examples is endless)
- usually cannot appear alone in a sentence
- must occur with one of about 50 verbs (**closed class**)
- together with a verb, they may form a *complex predicate*:
- combinations:
  - **liri-** … -ya- ‘**swim** + go’ (go swimming) **liri-** -di- ‘**swim** + come’ (come swimming)
  - **nyenh-** … -yu- ‘**be quiet** + be’ (be quiet) **nyenh-** -yobe- ‘**be quiet** + stay’ (stay quiet)
  - **wilh-** … -ya- ‘**walk** + go’ (go for a walk) **wilh-** … -ga- ‘**walk** + get’ (take someone for a walk)

The Case of Vurës

Vurës

(5) *Kōmōrōk* *a* *ēl* *o* ***bëtutu*** *wērēt.*
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **big** octopus
‘The two of us saw a big octopus.’

Vurës

(5) *Kōmōrōk a ēl o **bëtutu** wērēt.*
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **big** octopus
‘The two of us saw a big octopus.’

(6) *O wērēt gö=**luwō**.*
ART octopus IPFV=**be.big**
‘The octopus is big.’ / ‘the big octopus’

Vurës

(5) *Kōmōrōk a ēl o **bëtutu** wērēt.*
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **big** octopus
‘The two of us saw a big octopus.’

(6) *O wērēt gö=**luwō**.*
ART octopus IPFV=**be.big**
‘The octopus is big.’ / ‘the big octopus’

- ***bëtutu*** ‘big’ is an adjective
- but ***luwō*** ‘be big’ is a verb

Vurës

(5) *Kōmōrōk a ēl o **bëtutu** wērēt.*
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **big** octopus
‘The two of us saw a big octopus.’

(6) *O wērēt gö=**luwō**.*
ART octopus IPFV=**be.big**
‘The octopus is big.’ / ‘the big octopus’

(7) **Kōmōrōk a ēl o **luwō** wērēt.*
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **be.big** octopus
(intended: ‘The two of us saw a big octopus.’)

Vurës

(5) *Kōmōrōk* *a* *ēl* *o* ***bëtutu*** *wērēt.*
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **big** octopus
‘The two of us saw a big octopus.’

(6) *O* *wērēt* *gö=**luwō**.*
ART octopus IPFV=**be.big**
‘The octopus is big.’ / ‘the big octopus’

(7) **Kōmōrōk* *a* *ēl* *o* ***luwō*** *wērēt.*
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **be.big** octopus
(intended: ‘The two of us saw a big octopus.’)

(8) *Kōmōrōk* *a* *ēl* *o* *wērēt* *gö=**luwō**.*
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART octopus IPFV=**be.big**
‘The two of us saw a big octopus.’

Vurës

(5) *Kōmōrōk* *a* *ēl* [*o* ***bëtutu*** *wērēt*].
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **big** octopus
‘The two of us saw [a big octopus].’

(8) *Kōmōrōk* *a* *ēl* [*o* *wērēt* [*gö=**luwō***]].
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART octopus IPFV=**be.big**
‘The two of us saw [an octopus [being big]].’

Vurës

(5) *Kōmōrōk* *a* *ēl* [*o* ***bëtutu*** *wērēt*]$_{NP}$.
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART **big** octopus

‘The two of us saw [a big octopus].’

(8) *Kōmōrōk* *a* *ēl* [*o* *wērēt* [*gö=**luwō***]$_{VP}$]$_{NP}$.
1DU.EXCL AOR see ART octopus IPFV=**be.big**

‘The two of us saw [an octopus [being big]].’

Vurës

(9) *Ribot* *gē=**tisē*** *si* *ribot* *gō=**wē**.*
report IPFV=**be.bad** **or** report IPFV=**be.good**
‘a bad report or a good report’

(10) *Vaga* *nēk* *ga=da* *o* *wiwieg* *ge=**meñmeñ**.*
always 2SG IPFV=do ART work IPFV=**be.light**
‘You always do light work.’

Vurës

(11) *Ni* *vösus* *o* ***nötu*** *reqe.*
3SG.AOR give.birth ART **small** woman
‘She gave birth to a small girl.’

(12) *No* *gö=lölö* *gagneg* *o* ***qëtutu*** *kakaka* *iñkē*
1SG IPFV=want tell ART **short** story this
‘I want to tell this short story.’

Vurës

- adjectives are a **closed class** in Vurës: 11 words (Malau 2016:119)
- majority of property-root words are stative verbs, which are an **open class**
- all colour terms are stative verbs and no adjectives
- these words are predicational and head verb phrases
- this finding is important for work on ‘complex predicates’

Conclusion

Conclusion

- in Wagiman:
  - special open class: **coverb**
  - but **verbs** are closed class (English: open class)
  - **borrowings** from another language appear as new coverbs
  - some adjective-like words are **nouns** (the red one, the big one), some are **coverbs**, which are **open classes**
- in Vurës:
  - adjectives are a **closed class** (English: open class)
  - most adjective-like words are **stative verbs** (be red, be big), which is an **open class**
- this finding is important for work on ‘complex predicates’:
  - in order to find out what a predicate in a language is, word classes that can be predicational need to be determined first

References

François, Alexandre (2015). The ins and outs of up and down: Disentangling the nine geocentric space systems of Torres and Banks languages. In A. François, S. Lacrampe, M. J. Franjieh, & S. Schnell (eds.): *The languages of Vanuatu: Unity and diversity* (pp. 137-196). Canberra: Australian National University.

Hammarström, Harald & Bank, Sebastian & Forkel, Robert & Haspelmath, Martin (2018). *Glottolog 3.2*. Jena: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History. Available online at http://glottolog.org, Accessed on 2018-06-05.

Haspelmath, Martin (2010). How to compare major word-classes across the world's languages. In: *UCLA Working Papers in Linguistics, Theories of Everything 7*(16), pp. 109-130.

Koch, Harold; Rachel Nordlinger (eds.) (2014). *The Languages and Linguistics of Australia: A Comprehensive Guide*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Malau, Catriona (2016). *A Grammar of Vurës, Vanuatu*. Boston, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Simone, Raffaele & Masini, Francesca (2014). *Word Classes: Nature, typology and representations*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Wilson, Stephen (1999). *Coverbs and Complex Predicates in Wagiman*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.

Thank you