Issues in writing a grammatical sketch of 'Ôrôe

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Issues:
 Should I describe a grammar in the way of "function-to-form" or "form-to-function"?

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1. The 'Ôrôe language

'Ôrôe[1] is an Austronesian language spoken in New Caledonia. New Caledonia is located in the region of Melanesia in the southwest Pacific Ocean, 1500 kilometers from the Australian coast. In New Caledonia, along with the official language, French, and one Creole, twenty-eight indigenous languages are spoken. According to the census in 2004, more than half of them have less than 1000 speakers, and 'Ôrôe has only 355 speakers. 'Ôrôe is spoken in the southern part of the main island of New Caledonia. Only elderly people speak 'Ôrôe as a first language, and young people usually speak French. Some young people understand 'Ôrôe when they hear the language, but they rarely speak it. Therefore, 'Ôrôe is now in danger of becoming extinct, while almost no written record has been done up till now.

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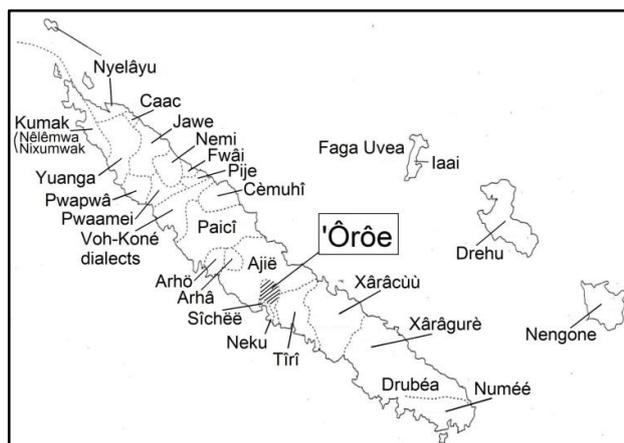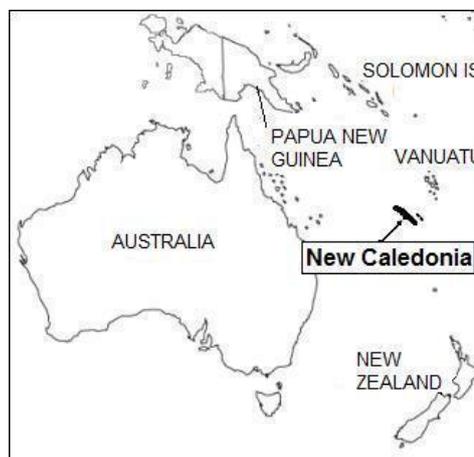
[1]'Ôrôe has 24 consonants (p[p], pw[pʷ],t[t], tj[c], k[k], kw[kʷ], b[b], bw[bʷ], d[d], dj[ɟ], g[g], gw[gʷ], '[ʔ], m[m], mw[mʷ], n[n], ny[ɲ], ng[ŋ], v[v], gh[ɣ], w[w], j[j], r[r], rr[ɾ]), and 15 vowels (i[i], ü[y], e[e], è[ɛ], a[a], ë[ə], u[u], ù[ɯ], o[o], ò[ɔ], î[ĩ], ê[ẽ], â[ã], û[ũ], ô[õ]).

The basic word order in 'Ôrôe is VS in an intransitive clause and VOA in a transitive clause. There are two types of clauses in 'Ôrôe: non-verbal and verbal. Certain noun modifiers such as determiners, quantifiers, and numerals occur before the nouns, whereas others such as demonstratives, nouns and pronouns follow the nouns. Verbs do not inflect. Grammatical relations between verb and the arguments are represented by the preposition. The case marking system is a nominative-accusative system. There are multiple types of possessive construction. So far, four possessive classifiers indicating food or drink are found. 'Ôrôe has a variety of verb compounds and verb serializations.

2. My study on 'Ôrôe language

When I was an undergraduate student, I had a lecture about the indigenous languages of New Caledonia from my professor. I saw many interesting linguistic phenomena which I had not seen in the languages I had studied before, and I became interested in those languages very much. In 2005, I conducted fieldwork in New Caledonia for the first time. I firstly studied the Neku language which is spoken in the next region besides the place where 'Ôrôe is spoken. As my master thesis, I wrote about the verbal prefixes and derived verbs in Neku. These prefixes indicate the means and manner of action, and combinable verb stems indicate the resulting states of an object.

After that, I started my study on the 'Ôrôe language in 2007 and have conducted field research for a total of six months so far. My data includes about 1000 basic words, grammatical data from elicitation, and the text data of 12 short stories. Based on this data, I am trying to write about the grammar of 'Ôrôe as my PhD thesis.

3. Issues in writing a grammatical sketch of 'Ôrôe

The problem which I have in writing a grammar is whether I describe the grammar in the way of "function-to-form" or "form-to-function". I would like to discuss this problem by showing the example of the description of "Copula clause".

In 'Ôroê, if we want to express copula clauses, such as 'A is B', five types of construction are found as shown on the next page. In the construction [1], two noun phrases are just juxtaposed. In [2], the second NP is introduced by the preposition *nâ=* which indicates nominative. In [3], the second NP is introduced by the conjunction *rè=* which means "that is" in English. In [4], the first NP is attached by the clitic pronoun which agrees in person and number with the second NP introduced by the preposition *nâ=*. In [5], the first NP occurs after the copula verb *tò* attached to the clitic pronoun which agrees in gender and number with the second NP.

If I write in the way of "function-to-form", I would have the section named "Copula clause" and I would explain all of the [1] to [5] constructions in the same section. Instead, if I choose the way of "form-to-function", I would have the section of "non-verbal clause" and "verbal clause", and put the constructions from [1] to [4] in the former section, and [5] in the latter section. If we compare the example [4] and [5], [4] is a non-verbal clause, and [5] is a verbal clause. However, these express the same meaning, so I am cautious of describing these two examples separately. Then, I would have one more question: -Do I need to have "non-verbal clause" and "verbal-clause"?

In addition, I would like to know whether we need to keep that way of describing consistently throughout the grammar, or we need to change the way depending on the section.

Copula Clause

Non-verbal Clause	**[1] NP NP**
	(1) pèrra'au ginâ
	Sunday today
	'Today is Sunday.'
	[2] NP Prep=NP
	(2) 'êakùù nâ='ê=nâ
	dancer NOM=man=this
	' This man is a dancer.'
	[3] NP CONJ=NP
	(3) 'ê=nâ rè='êakùù
	man=this CONJ=dancer
	'This man is a dancer.'
	[4] CPN=NP Prep=NP
	(4) i= 'êakùù nâ='ê=nâ
	3SG.NOM=dancer NOM=man=this
	' This man is a dancer.'
Verbal Clause	**[5] CPN=V NP Prep= NP**
	(5) i=tò 'êakùù nâ='ê=nâ
	3SG.NOM=be dancer NOM=man=this
	' This man is a dancer.'

Abbreviation:

NP : Noun phrase, Prep : Preposition, CONJ : Conjunction, CPN : Clitic pronoun

V : Verb, NOM=nominative, SG : singular, 3 : third person,

-: affix boundary, =: clitic boundary