

A tropical beach scene with palm trees and a blue sky. The text is overlaid on the image.

Verb classes in Lakurumau(New Ireland): transitivity pairs

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Lakurumau

Lakurumau is a still undescribed Austronesian language (Western Oceanic, Meso-Melanesian), spoken in the village Lakurumau, in the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea



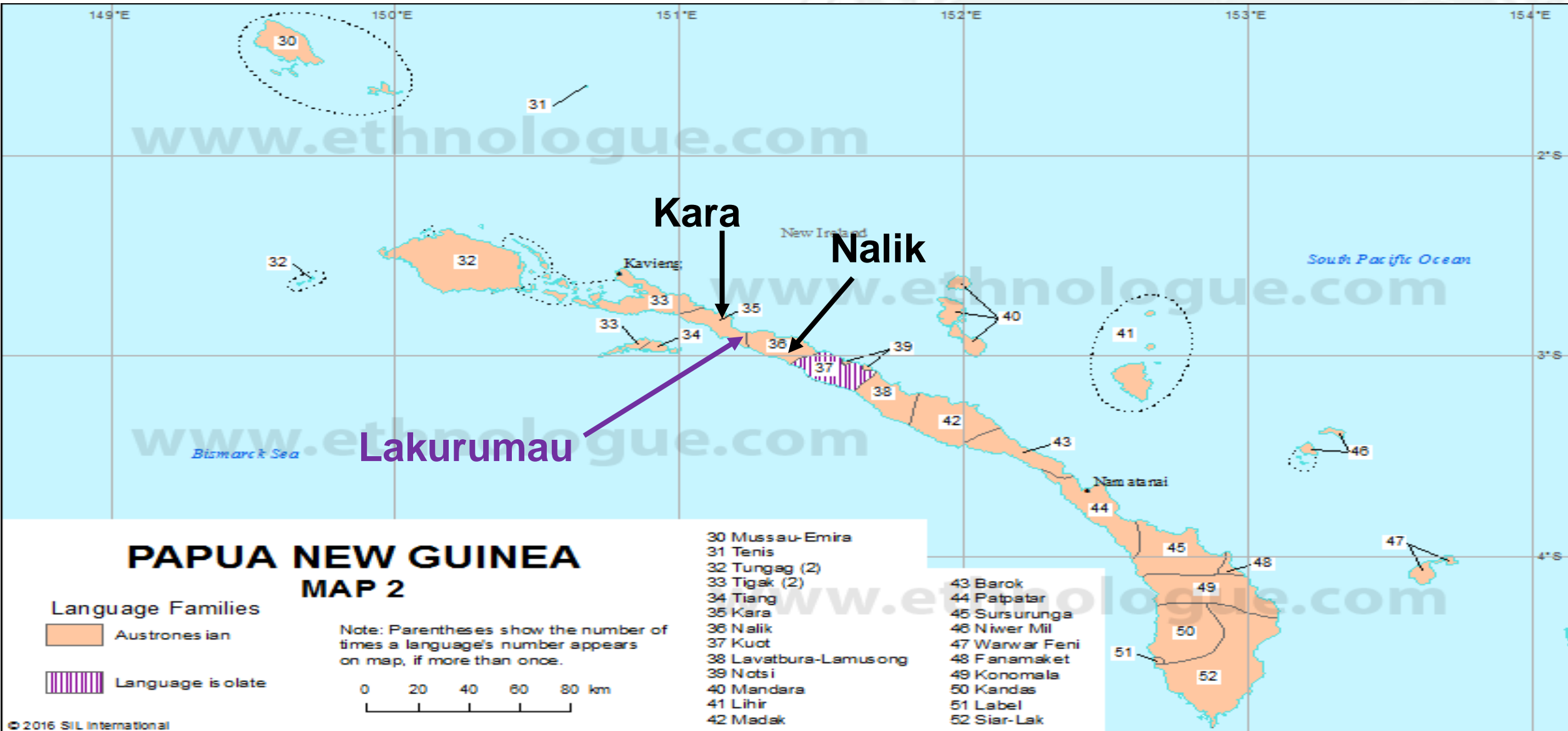
Lakurumau

Lakurumau is not (yet) a recognised language.

In Northern New Ireland, a network of six languages – Lavongai (Tungak), Tiang, Tigak, Kara, Lakurumau and Nalik – is found, which can be described as a **language chain** (Ross 1988)

Lakurumau has been previously mentioned as a *transitional language* or a *transitional dialect* between the two neighbouring languages Kara and Nalik; in actuality, the best definition of Lakurumau is as a distinct member of the **Lavongai-Nalik language chain**

Lakurumau



Lakurumau

- Lakurumau is nowadays spoken by **ca. 800 people** in Lakurumau and some others who live in other villages of the province; intermarriages with speakers of other languages are very frequent
- The language is **endangered** → **Tok Pisin** is the dominant language of the community; most children still have a very good passive knowledge of Lakurumau, but only some have also a good active competence

Lakurumau

- My documentation and description project (2017-2019): an audio-video corpus, a lexicon and a grammar sketch. <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI1093372>
- Three field trips (October – December 2017; May – August 2018; April – May 2019)
- 21h recorded; 17,5h transcribed and partially translated; morphosyntactic glossing in ongoing.
- 30 adult speakers (age 19 to 80); 3 children (aged 11, 13 and 16)
- Spontaneous conversations, procedural texts, narratives, stimuli-based narratives

Lakurumau

- Basic features:

- › a basic SVO word order, with left-dislocated topical objects;
- › four numbers: singular, dual, trial/paucal, plural. Dual and trial marking in VP involves optional proclitics and enclitics:

(1) *A fu boi u (o) vangan(=aai)*

ART DU pig SM.3NGS(SM.3DU) eat(=DU)

‘The two pigs eat’

Lakurumau

› VP structure:

Full pronoun or subject marker – (TAM markers) – (valency markers) - ROOT – (valency markers)
– (number markers (Du/Trial))

(2) a. *Ne vuna vangan boi*

1SG HAB eat.INTR pig

‘I always eat pig’

b. *Ga daa zop fa-maat a boi aa nanga ulai lo flu*

SM.1SG.IRR IRR hit CAUS-die ART pig and SM.1SG.R come LOC house

‘I will kill a pig and come back home’

Valency and transitivity

Margetts (1999) for Saliba

Valency is a property of the root (abstract lexical entity), while transitivity is a property of the inflected verb, ie. the verb stem (concrete instantiation of the root) with its pronominal subject and/or object affix

(3) Saliba

Ye-hai-ya-ko

3SG-get-3SG.O-PERF

‘He got it already’ (Margetts 1999: 93)

Valency and transitivity

VP structure: **Free pronoun and/or subject marker – (TAM) – STEM – (TR)**

Subject markers can be omitted in the 1. and 2. person if a free pronoun is present and there are no object affixes

(4) *A zalawaan akamaam u vuna vazú-i, u vuna vazú-i*
art z. this sm.3nsg hab plant-tr, s.3nsg hab plant-tr

‘They use to plant the zalawaan (a leaf), they always plant (it)’ (lox052)

Often, the inflected verb coincides with the stem: no subject, TAM or transitivity markers.

(5) *No xus naan*
fp.2sg tell fp.3sg
‘You told her’ (lox039)

Valency and transitivity

Types of stems (semantically bivalent roots; no valency-changing morphology as causatives or reciprocals)

Transitive: simplex transitive stem; intransitive stem + TR *-i*; stem in *-in*
zop ‘hit.TR’; *vazu-i* ‘plant’; *raxaam-in* ‘see’

Intransitive: simplex intransitive stems; stems in *-aai*
sop ‘help.INTR’; *vaazu* ‘plant. INTR’; *raxaam-aai* ‘look at’

Labile: simplex labile stems
galong ‘break a coconut’

Valency and transitivity

Three types of clauses:

- (1) With overt object
- (2) With incorporated object
- (3) With implicit object

(I do not consider ditransitive clauses here)



Valency and transitivity

(1) With overt object

(6) *Ne zop fa-maat a boi*
1SG hit CAUS-die ART pig
'I killed the pig'

Only **transitive** or **labile** stems can appear in these clauses



Valency and transitivity

(2) With incorporated object: The object is undetermined, non-specific and non-referential; it cannot be modified; all affixes follow the object NP and no elements can intervene between the verb and the object

(7) *U vangan boi=raan*
SM.3NSG eat pig=TRIAL
'The tree of them ate pig'

(8) *A yot boi=an*
art catch pig=NMLZ
'The capture of pigs' (lox213)

Only **intransitive** or **labile** stems can appear in these clauses

Valency and transitivity

(3) With implicit object

(9) *Pe di yaan*

so.that SM.1PL.INCL eat

‘(Why are you cooking the shells?) For us to eat’ (lox131)

Yaan is a transitive stem

(10) *Nanga ru-tun pana furalik sa-gu*

SM.1SG RED-cook for children POSS-1SG

‘I cook for my children’ (lox151)

Rutun is an intransitive stem

Usually, **transitive** and **labile** stems are used where the object is retrievable (8.) and **intransitive** and **labile** stems when it is implicit (9.)

Valency and transitivity

In Lakurumau, all verbal modifiers must be marked for transitivity:

(11) a. *No vuna vangan fadi **bul-aai***
1SG HAB eat.INTR banana always-INTR
'You always eat bananas' (lox106)

b. *Mo a revin ka buxura ka vala i-yaan **bulin** a boi...*
if ART woman SM.3SG pregnant SM.3SG go.on RED-eat.TR always-TR ART pig
,If a pregnant woman goes on eating pig...' (lox148)

Verb classes in Lakurumau

	Intransitive clauses (with incorporated object)	Transitive clause (with overt object)	Morphological process	
Class I.	<i>galong</i>	<i>galong</i>	No change (labile roots)	‘break a coconut’
Class II.	<i>kaabang</i> ['kabəŋ]	<i>xabong</i> [χə'boŋ]	Phonetic alternations	‘help’
Class III.	<i>vaazu</i>	<i>vazu-i</i>	<i>-i</i>	‘plant’
Class IV.	<i>raxaam-aa</i>	<i>raxaam-in</i>	<i>-in/-aa</i>	‘see/look at’

Class I.

The biggest class per number of verbs – **labile roots**

Ia. *yot* ‘catch’, *yuf* ‘pull’, *buaak* ‘break’, *ramin* ‘put’, *tis* ‘splash with water’, *pis* ‘tie’, *ftuk* ‘cut into pieces’, *maraan* ‘buy’, *saxot* ‘love, want’, *xus* ‘tell’, *fui* ‘untie’

Ib. *vazok* ‘break’, *vit* ‘beat’, *faai* ‘put down’, *weruf* ‘fetch’, *raxon* ‘chew’, *vangun* ‘wake up’, *goi* ‘harvest (bananas)’

The verbs of the first group also have a reduplicated form, which is always intransitive: *yot* – *yoyot* ‘catch’. The verbs of the second group cannot undergo reduplication

No clear criteria for the subdivision



Class II.

Class II. verbs distinguish their transitive and intransitive form by phonetic processes – so far, I have found 15 verbs in this class:

kaabang - *xabong* ‘help’; *kaali* - *xalin* ‘build’; *sop* - *zop* ‘hit’; *kaayas* - *xayos* ‘peel’; *kaavut* - *xavut* ‘wrap’; *faazak* - *vazaak* ‘carry’

- **Lenition:** *sop* [sɔp] INTR - *zop* [zɔp] TR ‘hit’
- **Stress:** *kaabang* ['ka:bəŋ] INTR - *xabong* [ɣə'boŋ] TR ‘help’
- **Vowel alternations:** *kayas* INTR - *xayos* TR ‘peel’

Class II.

Lenition: inter-vocalic spirantization that affects all unvoiced consonants

[k] > [ɣ]

[t] > [r]

[p] > [v]/[β]

[s] > [z]

[f] > [v]

Ne waan ‘I go’ vs. *Maam paan* ‘We go’

Even if, *de facto*, /ɣ/, /v/, /z/ and /r/ almost always occur as allophones of /k/, /f/, /s/ and /t/, they have morphological distinctive value, cf. the pair *kon* [kɔn] ‘spoil’ / *xon* [ɣɔn] ‘paddle’. In Class IV. verbs, when there are lenition alternations, the **intransitive** form always has a **non-leniate** consonant - also in intervocalic contexts

Class II.

Stress

The intransitive form usually has stress on the first syllable, while transitive forms have stress on the last one

INTR

TR

kaabang ['kabəŋ] – *xabong* [ɣə'bəŋ] ‘help’

faazak ['fazək] – *vazaak* [və'zak] ‘carry on shoulders’

Vowel alternations

INTR

TR

[a] - [ə] *kaavut* ['kavut] – *xavut* [ɣə'vut] ‘wrap’

[ə] - [ɔ] *kayas* [kə'yəs] – *xayos* [ɣə'yɔs] ‘peel’

[ə] - [a] *rabaf* [rə'bəf] – *rabaaf* [rə'baf] ‘slap’

Class II.

Possible cause: effect of the loss of POC final vowels and/or object clitics

Displacement of stress: on the former penultimate, now last syllable:

- Vowel quality changes due to stress displacement
- The lenition in transitive forms might be linked to the weakening of the syllable due to the stress shift: *faàzak* / *vazaàk* ,carry‘. However, the lenition process is also active in monosyllabic verbs: *sop* / *zop* ,hit‘; it is also present in languages where the object suffixes are still present (as Kara)

Other languages of the Lavongai/Nalik chain testify to the lenition differentiation between transitive and intransitive forms too (Kara, Nalik, Lavongai)

Class III.

All stems ending in vowel belong in Class III.:

vaazu – *vazu-i* ‘plant’; *saxo* – *saxoi* ‘sew leaves for rooftops’; *taba* – *rabaai* ‘give’; *te* – *rayaai* ‘cut horizontally’

Stems ending in *-i* can be either classified as Class I or Class II:

roi – *roi* (**roii*) ‘touch, hold’; *woi* – *woi* (**woii*) ‘spear’

The transitivizer *-i* is also found in secondary transitives and adverbs:

waxo ‘fall’ – *va.caus-paxo-i* ‘make fall’

mara ‘first’ (in intransitive clauses) – *mara-i* ‘first’ (in transitive clauses)

Class IV.

The verbs in this class do not have a simplex stem, only a suffixed one: TR *-in* (*-en*)(< POC applicative **-ani*; Ross un. ms.) vs. INTR *-aai* (< POC **-aki(ni)*)

raxaam-in ‘see’ – *raxaam-aai* ‘look at’ **raxaam*

rox-in – *rox-aai* ‘have’ **rox*

Exception: *woxin* – *woxaai* ‘do; work’ → *wok* from Tok Pisin *wok* ‘work; do’

tangin – *tingaai* ‘find’; *vazokin* – *vazokaai* ‘hang - be hanging’; *rapin* – *rapaai* ‘throw’; *xavin* – *xavaai* ‘bury’; *walongin* – *walongaai* ‘hear’; *fingin* – *fiaai* ‘ask’; *botin* – *botaai* ‘protect, cover’; *viren* – *viraai* ‘teach’

Adverbs

bulin – *bulaai* ‘always’; *marasaaxen* – *marasaxaa* ‘very much’; *fexaabunin* – *fexabunaai* ‘together’

Class IV.

POC *-*ani* (Ross un. ms.)

- Applicative
- Reflects in some languages of the Admiralties group, Meso-Melanesian (New Ireland) and North New Guinea linkages, as well as in Daakaka (North Vanuatu linkage)

In Lakurumau: *-in* can also attach to simplex intransitive stems with a **causative** or **applicative** function (with no counterpart in *-aai*)

vaaigot ‘be ready’ → *vaaigot-in* ‘prepare’ (**vaaigotaai*)

marala ‘be angry’: (12) a. *Ne marala pa-num* b. *Ne maral-en* *no*
1sg be.angry obl-2sg 1sg be.angry-appl 2sg
‘I am angry with you’

Class IV.

All Lavongai/Nalik languages have reflexes of **-ani*, which is the general transitivizer (causative and applicative), and reflexes of **de-transitivizing** **-aki*.

In other languages instead reflexes of **-ani* and **-aki(ni)* co-exist as valency-increasing devices

In the other Lavongai/Nalik languages, *-(a)ai* can apparently attach to simplex stems to create intransitives (with antipassive function), with no need to have a counterpart in **-ani*

Kara *fun* 'hide.TR' – *fun-ai* 'hide.INTR' (Dryer 2013)

Verb classes in Lakurumau – isolated examples

- **Suppletion**

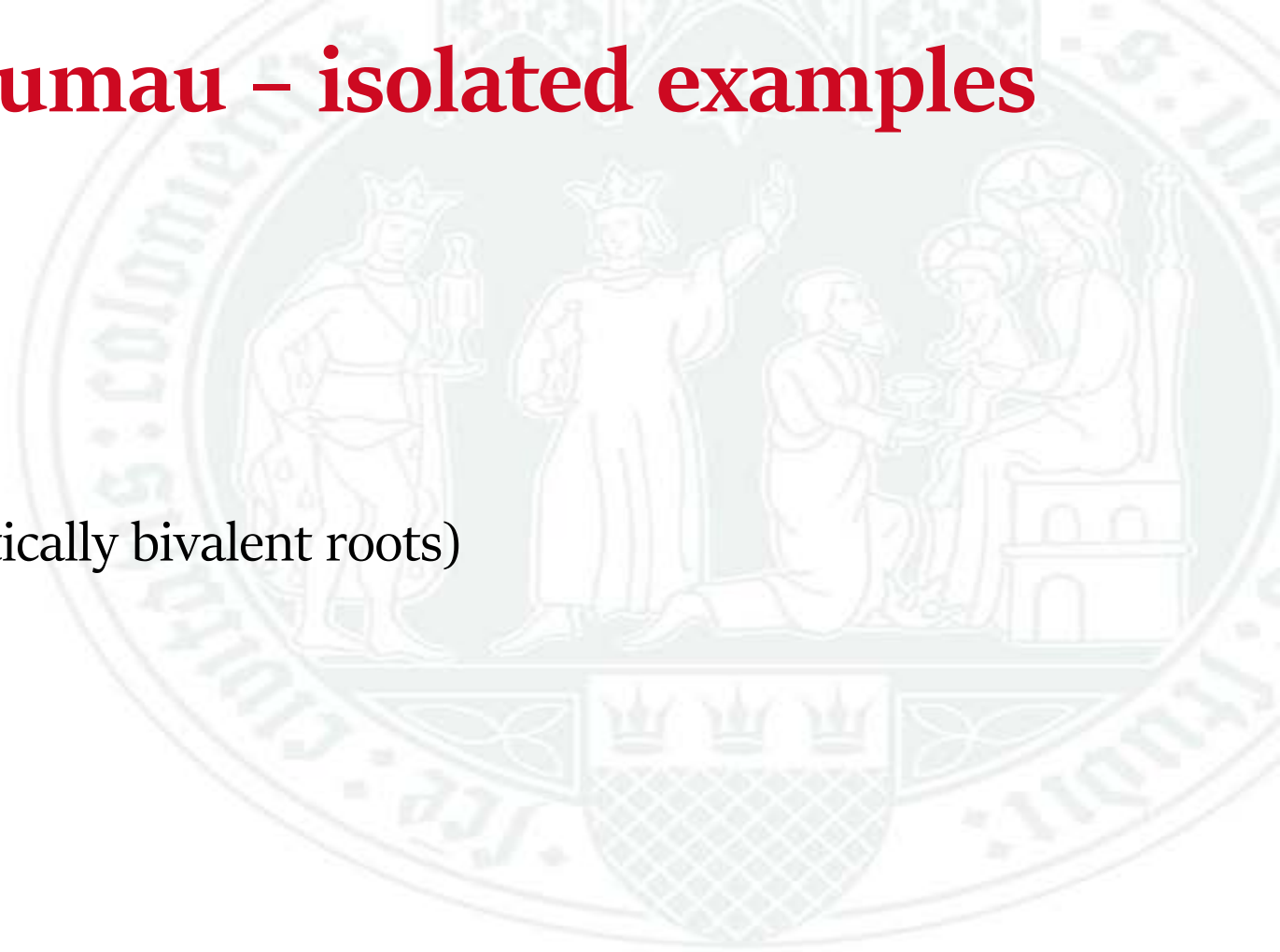
yaan ‘eat.TR’ – *vangan* ‘eat.INTR’

- **Only intransitive/transitive stems** (semantically bivalent roots)

pik ‘pick firewood.INTR’

lis ‘bring.TR’

zalen ‘push through.TR’



Verb classes in Lakurumau - conclusions

Semantically bivalent roots in Lakurumau form four stem classes:

Class I. (labile) is a quite common class in Oceanic languages;

Class II. (TR with *-i*) and Class IV. (*-in /-aai*) display known Oceanic morphology

Class II. (phonetic alternations) is instead language (or better, language group) specific; it might have emerged as a consequence of stress shifts



Verb classes in Lakurumau - conclusions

Properties of the verb classes

Class I. (labile stems)

No clear semantic or phonetic properties

Class II. (-*i*)

No clear semantic properties; vowel stems

Class III. (phonetic alternations)

No clear semantic or phonetic properties

Class IV. (-*in* /-*aai*)

All verbs take Themes (not Patients)

find, see, throw, ask, hang, hear

→ due to the semantics of *-*ani*

Further research: the relation between *-*ani* and *-*aki(ni)* – both in their co-existence as valency-increasing devices and as as valency-increasing vs. valency-decreasing devices

Ka doxo marasaxaa! Thank you!



Thank you to all
people in Lakurumau,
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