

# Passive *ni* and three other *ni*'s in **Bola** (Oceanic): synchrony and diachrony

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# Outline

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*Oil palm plantation in Bola*

# 1. Introduction

The shortest morphemes in a language can be the most **elusive** to describe. Examples:

**Dutch**      *er*

**French**     *y*

**Japanese**   *wa*

**Tok Pisin**   *i*

**Muna**       *o*

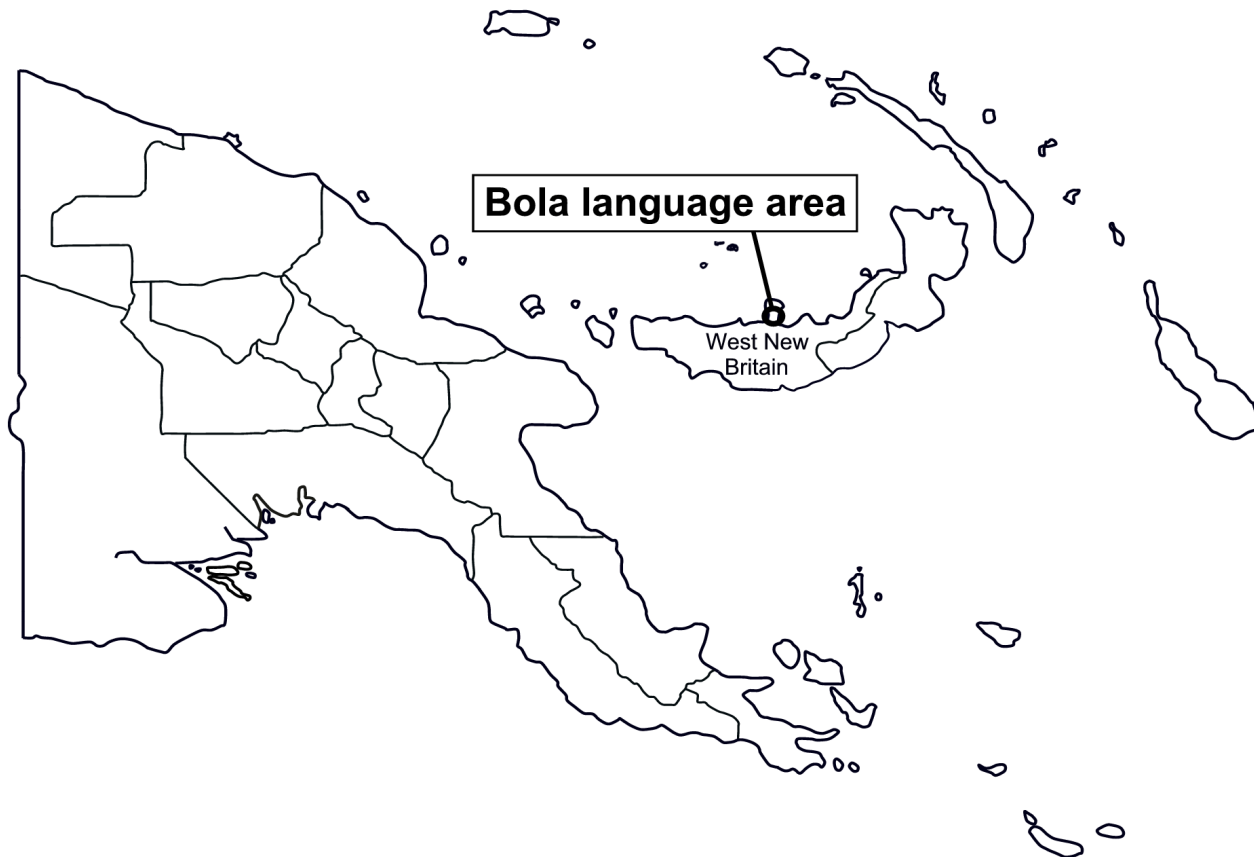
**Bola**        *ni*

# 1. Introduction: **Bola**

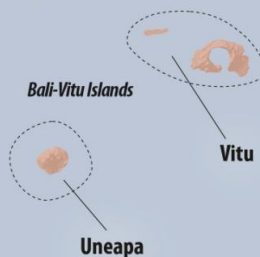
Papua New Guinea – West New Britain

Oceanic, Meso-Melanesian – 14,000 speakers

Grammar sketch: van den Berg and Wiebe (2019)



# West New Britain Province Language Map



## SIL & BTA in Papua New Guinea

SIL-PNG is a nonprofit organisation that works with indigenous languages in literacy, language development, language documentation and translation (including health, educational and church materials). SIL-PNG partners with local communities, Papua New Guinean organisations (like the PNG Bible Translation Association) and the PNG Government to help meet the felt needs of language communities.

### West New Britain Province Languages

[aix] Aighon	[bjl] Bulu	[mpo] Miu
[mwgl] Aiklep	[gip] Gimi	[mwh] Mouk-Aria
[akt] Aikolet	[xko] Karore	[nak] Nakanai
[aie] Amara	[pss] Kaulong	[ata] Pele-Ata
[apo] Ambul	[kvc] Kove	[ssz] Sengseng
[let] Amio-Gelimi	[lmg] Lamogai	[aaw] Solong
[anz] Anem	[khl] Lusi	[tqp] Tomoip
[avb] Avau	[mgl] Maleu-Kilenge	[bbn] Uneapa
[bch] Bariai	[mbh] Mangseng	[wiv] Vitu
[bek] Bebeli	[mee] Mengen	
[bnp] Bola	[mxm] Meramera	

## 2. Bola: **basic typology**

- 5 vowels, 13 consonants
- only V and VC syllables
- pronouns: sg, dual, paucal, plural
- five pronominal sets: free, subj, obj, poss, oblique
- alienable-inalienable possession: only sg
- articles: proper *e*, common *a*; definite *ra* and *re*
- extensive TAM marking
- word order: transitive SVO; intransitive VS and SV

### 3. Passive *ni*

- (1) *Ni kapo na moke a poda-na viri i mate.*  
PASS wrap OBL pandanus.mat ART body-3S person 3S die  
'The body of the dead person is wrapped in a pandanus mat.' (t12:6)

Features of passive clauses:

- The clause is headed by a **transitive** verb, passivised by means of the proclitic *ni*.
- There is **no subject agreement**; *ni* is never preceded by a subject marker.
- Passives are obligatorily **agentless**.



### 3. Passive *ni*

- Passives are used when the agent is **unknown or irrelevant**; this is especially common in procedural discourse.
- The **modal marker *gi* (irrealis)** is the only element that can come between the passive marker and the verb.

(2) *Na tahuna ni hae lobo a ruma...*  
OBL time PASS build finish ART house  
'When the house has been built...' (t11:57)

(3) *Ioe ni gi va-kani muri ma.*  
2S.F PASS IRR CAUS-eat later yet  
'You will be fed later.' (elic)



## 4. Nominalising *ni-*

- A prefix directly added to the base.
- Fully productive on all verbs and adjectives.

<i>ni-hae</i>	‘building’	<i>hae</i>	‘build’
<i>ni-hebi</i>	‘door’	<i>hebi</i>	‘close’
<i>ni-here</i>	‘writing’	<i>here</i>	‘write’
<i>ni-lobo</i>	‘finish, end’	<i>lobo</i>	‘finish, complete’
<i>ni-made</i>	‘life, living, existence’	<i>made</i>	‘sit, live’
<i>ni-madihi</i>	‘pain’	<i>madihi</i>	‘hurt, painful’

## 4. Nominalising *ni-*

- Takes the common article *a*.

(8) *A ni-hae na ruma a leho dagi hateka.*  
ART NMLZ-build OBL house ART work big very  
'Building a house is a very big job.' (t11:13)

- **Possessor:** usually alienable (oblique), with some nouns also inalienable (poss. suffix)

## 4. Nominalising *ni-*

Possessor as oblique pronoun:

Possessor as possessive suffix:

(10) *a ni-havai nau*  
ART NMLZ-travel.far 1S.OBL  
'my trip'

(11) *a ni-made vomu*  
ART NMLZ-sit 2S.OBL  
'your life'

(12) *a ni-ta-gu*  
ART NMLZ-say-1S  
'my word'

(13) *a ni-kani-mu*  
ART NMLZ-eat-2S  
'your style/way of eating'  
(cf. *a k<in>ani vomu* or  
*a kani-a vomu* 'your food')

## 5. Complementiser *ni*

(15) *Ru ngaru ni havai.*

3D want COMP travel.far

‘The two of them wanted to go on a journey.’ (t5:2)

- Most complementiser clauses are simply **juxtaposed** to the main clause.
- The *ni*-complement clause follows a **restricted set of verbs**, including verbs of volition, verbs of ability, phasal verbs.
- The *ni*-complement clause **lacks a subject** marker.
- The subject of the *ni*-complement clause is understood to be **the same** as that of the main clause.
- The verb following *ni* can be a transitive verb with an **object suffix**.
- Modal markers are **ungrammatical** in a *ni*-complement clause.

## 5. Complementiser *ni*

- (16) *Iau a marikoi ni leho.*  
1S.F 1S not.like COMP work

‘I don’t want to work.’ (dict)

- (17) *I kerī ni lakavu-a.*  
3S unable COMP catch-3S

‘He was unable to catch it.’ (dict)

- (18) *A mangenge ni dili tabukoi na lavu iau.*  
1S afraid COMP go.in near OBL beach 1S.F

‘I am afraid to go in close to the beach.’ (t5:43)

- (19) *Lakea i vakatubu ni tangi.*  
then 3S begin COMP cry

‘Then she began to cry.’ (t49:14)

## 5. Complementiser *ni*

The complementiser *ni* cannot be followed by passive *ni*. The expected sequence *\*ni ni* is disallowed, and instead *ni gi* surfaces, possibly due to dissimilation.

(21) a. *I koi ni kori.*  
3S not.want COMP help  
'He does not want to help.' (elic)

b. *I koi ni gi kori.*  
3S not.want COMP PASS.COMP help  
'He does not want to be helped.' (elic)



## 6. Qualitative *ni*

- (30) *a bakovi ni vaka-bebe a balu*  
ART man QUAL CAUS-fly ART plane  
'the pilot' (lit. 'the man flying the plane') (t6:8)

A distinct type of relative clause: **qualitative relative**.

Regular relative clauses have no formal marking.

- (27) *A ra bakovi [i made muga]....*  
ART DEF man 3S sit front  
'That man who is sitting in front...'

- (28) *A bakovi [ri ngaru-a]...*  
ART man 3PL want-3S  
'The man they wanted...'



## 6. Qualitative *ni*

- A *ni*-relative clause always follows a **common noun**.
- This relative clause is **non-finite**, as there is no subject marker (though objects and oblique phrases can be present).
- These clauses are particularly common to describe a **permanent quality** or a characteristic feature of people or objects.
- They often have **one-word translation** equivalents in English ('pilot', 'joker', 'farmer').

## 6. Qualitative *ni*

- (31) *a bakovi ni ta vaka-rika*  
ART man QUAL talk CAUS-funny  
'a joker' (lit. 'a man who talks funny') (dict)
- (32) *a maki ni kani*  
ART thing QUAL eat  
'food' (lit. 'something to eat') (t1:13)
- (33) *a maki ni mahita vona*  
ART thing QUAL sleep 3S.OBL  
'something to sleep on' (conv)
- (34) *E Noa a bakovi ni leho na hania.*  
ART.P N. ART man QUAL work OBL garden  
'Noah was a gardener/farmer.'  
(Lit. '... a man who worked in the garden.') (Gn 9:20)

## 7. Diachrony

1. Bola passive *ni* and nominalising *ni-* and *-in-* are direct reflexes of **PMP** *\*-in-* , marking a) perfective patient voice; b) nominalisation (Ross 2002).

Full formal and functional equivalence.

Differences with PMP:

- Bola passive is agentless.
- Bola passive has low token frequency.
- It has lost its perfective meaning.
- It has become a proclitic.

Its presence in Bola means that Proto-Oceanic **retained** passive *ni-* (see van den Berg and Boerger 2011).

# 7. Diachrony

2. Qualitative *ni*: reflects the POc **possessive preposition *ni*, used for non-specific possessors** (Hooper 1985, Ross 1998, Lynch et al. 2002)

(40) \**a*    *polo ni niuR*  
      ART juice NI coconut  
      ‘coconut water’

(41) \**a*    *Rumaq ni Reqi*  
      ART house NI elephant.grass  
      ‘a grass house’

(42) \**a*    *Rumaq ni turuR*  
      ART house NI sleep  
      ‘a rest house’ (lit. house of sleep’)

## 7. Diachrony

Question. Did POc allow this *ni* to be followed by a (non-finite) clause? This is possible in Bola:

- (30) *a bakovi ni vaka-bebe a balu*  
ART man QUAL CAUS-fly ART plane  
'the pilot' (lit. 'the man flying the plane') (t6:8)

Unclear for POc, not addressed in the literature.

## 7. Diachrony

### 3. Origin of complementiser *ni*, two options.

(20) *Lakea i vakatubu ni tangi.*  
then 3s begin COMP cry  
'Then she began to cry.' (t49:14)

#### a) An extension of the POc possessive morpheme *ni*:

POc      *\*N ni N / V*

Pre-Bola *\*N ni V / Clause*      (*N ni N* is ungrammatical)

Bola      ***V** ni N / Clause*

Are there convincing cross-linguistic parallels?

And why does *ni* not occur in regular relative clauses?

## 7. Diachrony

b) Bola *ni* reflects a Proto-Oceanic subordinating conjunction *\*ni* (not previously recognised).

A complementiser *ni* is found in at least three other Oceanic languages: Fijian, Rotuman, Lau (SI):

- **Fijian** (45) *āū kilā ni-o rawa ni vodo ose*  
1S know.3S SUB-2S able SUB ride horse  
'I know that you can ride horseback.'
- **Lau** (46) *Gera mou ni oli.*  
3PL afraid COMP return  
'They were afraid to return.'



# Conclusion

- Bola has four morphemes *ni*, structurally and semantically quite distinct, best analysed as four **homophonous** morphemes.
- The diachrony of three of the *ni*'s is clear, but the origin of the complementiser *ni* is **unclear** at this point.

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