

An Unusual Passive in Western Oceanic: The Case of Vitu

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Passive constructions are very rare in Melanesia and no passive is reconstructed for Proto Oceanic. In this paper I report on a hitherto unreported passive in Vitu, a Meso-Melanesian language spoken in West New Britain, PNG.

Specific features of the passive in Vitu:

- the passive morpheme has several allomorphs: vowel umlaut, *-(a)nga*, and *-Ca*;
- the agent is obligatorily absent;
- the subject may either precede or follow the verb (regular word order is SVO);
- if a non-3rd person subject occurs after the verb, the preverbal particle will still be a 3rd singular form. This particle marks aspect-mood-sequentiality.

An example of an active-passive pair (showing vowel umlaut) is the following:

- (1) a. Hau ta kati-a buk kua ni Ukarumpa.
I REAL make-3SO book this LOC Ukarumpa

'I made this book in Ukarumpa.'

- b. Buk kua e katua ni Ukarumpa.
book this REAL:3 make:PASS LOC Ukarumpa

'This book was made in Ukarumpa.'

The paper describes the various passive allomorphs, the structural properties of the passive construction and attempts to provide a diachronic scenario through which the passive may have arisen.