

**Reversible & iterative particles  
in northern Vanuatu languages**

The languages of the Torres & Banks Islands have two sets of forms with a similar meaning:

- a postverbal modifier I here gloss **'REVERSIVE'**, similar to Eng. *back* in 'go back' or 'pay s.o. back'. Indicates that the event somehow reverses or contradicts the effect of a previous event.
- another postverbal modifier I gloss **'AGAIN'**, presenting an event as somehow a repetition of a previous event; it can also mean 'ALSO'.

The two modifiers can occur on their own, but most often they cooccur; in which case they always come in the order {Reversible + again}:

<i>Hiw</i>	niə	at	<b>ŋ<sup>w</sup>ujə</b>	<b>wəjɔɣ</b>	mə.	
<i>Lemerig</i>	ti	m-	<b>ɪs</b>	<b>lik</b>	mɛ.	
<i>Mwotlap</i>	kɪ	m-	<b>ih</b>	<b>sɛ</b>	mɛ.	
<i>Dorig</i>	ni	m-	<b>ɪs</b>	<b>mlɪ</b>	ma.	
<i>Lakon</i>	nɪ	n-	<b>ʔɪs</b>	<b>lih</b>	ma.	
	3sg	PERF	be.alive	Reversible	again	hither

‘He has come back to life again.’

While the languages are all structurally parallel, the forms are diverse (see next page).

Most languages have an etymon **\*ngelu** for the 'Reversible', of unclear origin (perhaps 'backwards'). Three languages, in bold below, use the verb 'return' (<POc **\*mule**) for their Reversible. See Frank Lichtenberk's *heterosemy* paper, and indeed Claire Moyse-Faurie's COOL8 talk.

The word for 'also, again' is even more diverse. One etymon that stands out can be reconstructed as **\*mule(ŋ)i** ~ **\*mula(ŋ)i**; it is quite possible that it is derived historically (yet rather irregularly) from **\*mule**.

Nothing here seems to be cognate either with *ghua*, or *\*voki*, or anything else I know in other languages.

Best,

Alex.

Table 1 – Words for ‘back’ (Reversive) and ‘again’  
in Northern Vanuatu languages

	‘Reversive’	‘also, again’
<i>Hiw</i>	<b>ŋ<sup>w</sup>ujə</b>	wəjɔŋ
<i>Lo-Toga</i>	<b>ŋ<sup>w</sup>ulə</b>	wələ
<i>Lehali</i>	lək	wjæ
<i>Löyöp</i>	ləm	wilɪ
<i>Volow</i>	<b>məl</b>	sɛ
<i>Mwotlap</i>	lək	sɛ
<i>Lemerig</i>	kɪl	lik
<i>Vera'a</i>	kɪl	rɛk
<i>Vurës</i>	kɪl	<b><sup>m</sup>bilɪŋ</b>
<i>Mwesen</i>	kɪl	<b>mɪlɪŋ</b>
<i>Mota</i>	kel	<b>mlaŋ</b>
<i>Nume</i>	kɪl	<b>mɪlɪ</b>
<i>Dorig</i>	kɪl	<b>mɪlɪ</b>
<i>Koro</i>	kɪl	<b>mala</b>
<i>Oirat</i>	kɪl	<b>mula</b>
<i>Lakon</i>	lək	lɪh
<i>Mwerlap</i>	kɪl	<b>mila</b>