

Variation in Vatlongos subject-indexing prefixes

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Vatlongos is an Oceanic language of Vanuatu spoken in villages of Southeast Ambrym and in Mele Maat, a periurban community just outside the capital of Vanuatu, who relocated following a volcanic explosion in the 1950s. The northernmost of the Vatlongos-speaking villages on Ambrym, Endu, has strong links with communities of Northern Ambrym, including long traditions of intermarriage.

Vatlongos subject-indexing prefixes are characterized by patterns of syncretism, where a single form realises more than one set of grammatical features, and overabundance, where more than one form realises a single set of grammatical features without clear phonological or morphological conditions on variants. This talk will discuss three patterns of variation, how the variants relate to a speaker's community background, and how they relate to possible simplification of the Vatlongos subject-indexing system.