ON PROSODIC RELATIONS BETWEEN FIJIAN BASES
AND VERBAL SUFFIXES[1]

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From the earliest days in the study of the Fijian (FI) language the origins, functions and the degree of predictability of its verbal suffixes have bewildered all those who have tried to understand Fijian grammar, and they continue to do so. The problem in question is a suggestive example of the interaction between synchronic and diachronic factors in language and of its consequence for linguistic analysis.

It will be remembered that a Fijian word-stem or base (the latter term being widely employed in the description of Austronesian languages to distinguish 'content words' from 'functors') subsumes both verbal and nominal word classes.[2] It may be disyllabic (CVCV), by far the most common statistically, or trisyllabic (CVCVCV). The vowel slots are always filled, but in disyllabic bases the initial and/or the medial consonant is optional. In trisyllabic bases the medial and/or the final consonant is optional.[3] There is also a small number of bases of more than three syllables.[4]

When a base is a verb it may occur in any one of these three standard forms. It is then said to be stative or intransitive, according to certain syntactic criteria. When a verb is followed by a monosyllabic suffix (C)V or by a disyllabic suffix (C)VCV it is said to be transitive. Recent studies, however, have questioned the applicability of terms such as 'transitivity' to this feature of Fijian grammar[5] (Hockett 1976: 192; Naylor 1978: 405; Schütz 1981: 197-203).

One of the most interesting problems in the comparative study of Austronesian languages is that on the one hand in Fijian, as in other Oceanic languages:

1. The occurrence or non-occurrence of transitive suffixes is subject to certain semantic and syntactic criteria which are not yet fully understood; and

2. The consonant of a monosyllabic suffix: (C)V,[6] and the first consonant of a disyllabic suffix: (C)VCV, is selected from a limited series within the total inventory of consonants (cf. Pawley 1978: 113-40).

In many other members of the Austronesian family, on the other hand, and especially in Indonesian languages, cognate

verbs may occur which, in a fairly large number of cases, show
regular sound correspondences between their (non-significant)
stem-final consonants and the consonants of the verbal suffixes
of Fijian and other Oceanic languages.

Thus, Proto-Indonesian *taṇit' 'cry' corresponds to
Fijian tagica[7] /taṇiða/ 'cry for (i.e. so as to obtain) something'.

Proto-Indonesian *davat 'reach; obtain' corresponds to
Fijian rawata 'get, obtain'.

Since the stem-final consonants of verbs like Proto-
Indonesian *taṇit' and *davat are not known to have had a grammat-
ical function and the corresponding stem-final consonants of
verbs in modern Indonesian languages do not have such a function,
while corresponding consonants in Fijian and other Oceanic
languages occur in suffixes entering into regular grammatical
relations, intriguing questions arise regarding the origins,
nature and the precise functions of these features. In particular,
three immediate questions which arise are:

1. How can one account for the fact that these sound correspond-
ences can be attested in a significant number, but by no means
in a majority of cases?

2. Are the stem-final consonants of modern Indonesian verbs
vestigial in the sense that they might be the extant reflexes of
'archaic' grammatical suffixes which have now disappeared but
continue to function in Oceanic languages such as Fijian? (cf.
Dahl 1973:11). This is a question which should be asked even if
it cannot be answered in the present state of our knowledge.

3. Should the verbal suffixes of Fijian be regarded as an
integral part of the bases to which they may or may not be
attached? That is to say, is the choice of consonant determined:

(a) By the base and suffix considered as an artic-
ulated (and of course separable) but integral lexical
entity,[8] or:

(b) By semantic and syntactic factors, that is to say,
by the independently variable relations which can
obtain between a verb and its potential objects or
complements?

In the earliest days of the study of the Fijian language,
Hazlewood (1872: 32-3), in his work originally published in 1850,
after listing 'The Definite-Transitive Terminations' in two
classes, states that:

> 1. Those which consists of *one syllable.* These are,
> -<u>a</u>, -<u>ca</u>, -<u>ga</u>, -<u>ka</u>, -<u>ma</u>, -<u>na</u>, -<u>ra</u>, -<u>ta</u>, -<u>va</u>, -<u>wa</u> and
> -<u>ya</u> ...

Later he adds that:

> 2. There appears to be no certain rule to determine
> which termination a verb will take. This must be
> learned from the natives, or from the Dictionary.
>
> 3. But notwithstanding that there is no invariable
> rule, yet we are persuaded that they (sc. the termina-
> tions) are not always used arbitrarily ... (1.) It
> seems to amount to a rule, that *verbs formed from nouns*
> *without prefixing* <u>vaka-</u>, shall take <u>na</u> for their
> termination ... (2.) It appears also to be a rule,
> that *verbs of motion* will take <u>va</u> for their termination;
> as <u>lakova</u>, <u>ciciva</u>, <u>kadava</u>, <u>drodrova</u>, ... <u>Va</u> here
> means *to.* It is also true that many other verbs besides
> those of motion take <u>va</u>, but for these perhaps there is
> no rule. (3.) When verbs reject a termination of the
> first or monosyllabic class, and take one of the second,
> or disyllabic, they frequently have either a *more*
> *intensive sense*, or *take a different object.*

Nearly a century later, Churchward in *A new Fijian*
grammar (1941: 17-8; 71-2) speaks of: 'definite-transitive verbs',
and he states that:

> different verbs take different suffixes and there
> seems to be no rule for determining which suffix any
> particular verb will take.

This is also the view taken by the present writer in
his *Fijian grammar*:

> There is no known rule to indicate which suffix is
> appropriate to what base. It is advisable therefore
> to learn each new base together with its correct
> suffix or suffixes. (Milner 1972: 27-8)[9]

These words, written nearly thirty years ago, must now
be qualified, not only in the context of the result of subsequent
study by the present writer and his colleagues which have become
available in the meantime,[10] but also in the light of recent
attention given to the same problem in connection with the
preparation of a new Fijian dictionary.[11]

It is necessary first to refer to Dempwolff's (1934-9)
Vergleichende Lautlehre, which has for over forty years been an
indispenable text in comparative Austronesian linguistics. It
will be remembered that in his first monograph (Dempwolff 1934:

27-8) he distinguishes five categories of word stems (*Wortstämme*).
The first, which makes up 70% of his field of 1000 items,
consists of those which conform to the pattern CVCVC (e.g.
*<u>laŋit</u>).   Next in frequency comes word-stems of the same pattern
with the addition of an optional nasal 'connector' (*Nasal-
verbindung*), hence of the pattern CV(C)CVC (*<u>suŋsoŋ</u>, *<u>guntiŋ</u>).
They make up another 20% of the total.   Another 5% consists of
reduplicated items, followed by 3% made up of word-stems of more
than two syllables.   The remainder, approximately 1%, consists
of monosyllabic word-stems,

        In his second monograph (Dempwolff 1937: 125-66) he
compares two Melanesian languages with his reconstructed Proto-
Austronesian (PAN) word-stems, one of the two being Fijian, the
vocabulary of which is examined in detail in order to arrive at
regular correspondences (*ibid.*, 126-46).   He is struck by the
number of irregular, as well as regular, reflexes of his proposed
reconstructions in Fijian.   Of particular relevance to the
problem under discussion here are the following passages:

        Phonetic disagreements (lit. non-agreements of sound:
        Lautunstimmigkeiten) (occur) especially frequently
        with the final consonants of Fijian before a supporting
        suffix...

        From these data we shall draw the conclusion here that
        these phonetic disagreements of Fijian must be
        interpreted as 'false' analogy... (*ibid.*, 133-4,
        para. 127(a) 6).[12]

        It is interesting that perhaps in order not to give
hostages to fortune, Dempwolff used inverted commas for 'false'
in 'false analogy'.   At the time when he was assembling his data,
knowledge of the vocabulary of Fijian was much less advanced than
it is now, half a century later.   With hindsight, therefore, and
the advantage of greater knowledge of Fijian grammar than Dempwolff
had either the possibility or the opportunity of acquiring, it
was useful for me to check his data where they bear directly on
the correspondences between Fijian verbal suffixes and the
reconstructed final consonants of PAN verbs.

        Looking again at his PAN glossary in detail (Dempwolff
1938) with this particular end in view, I find 143 items which are
suitable for comparison.   Of these, 61 (i.e. two more than he was
prepared to accept) show 'correct' (i.e. regular) correspondences,
assuming, that is, that one accepts his own criteria for what is
(and what is not) 'regular'.

        67 are 'incorrect'.   This total subsumes not only cases
where the proposed correspondence is 'irregular' according to
Dempwolff himself, but cases where there is another reason for
rejection.   Some of the non-admissible comparisons arise from an