

A note on genital de-flipflopping, with an apology to Tsou *boki*

Paul K. Benedict
Ormond Beach, Florida

The commission of errors or boobos¹ can be counted an occupational hazard for comparativists and I have made at least my share of them. I'd like to ascribe them all to my juvenilia but for those after age 50 or 60 this becomes disingenuous. My very worst, in fact, dates only from 1975 (*Austro-Thai: Language and Culture* [ATLC]); it was adopted by Matisoff in 1978 (*Variational Semantics in Tibeto-Burman*) and further promoted in my 1979 "A note on Karen genital flipflop" (*LTBA* 5.1:21-35). For me as, I suspect, for most linguists, words and roots tend to have lives of their own and one must cringe to see them amputated, eviscerated or otherwise mutilated or mistreated. I owe an apology to Tsou *boki*, as will be evident from the following.

Tsou *boki* has the borrowed appearance of its English counterpart: 'penis', probably also the same underlying cultural basis (prudery) for the very fact of the loan; PAN **b* regularly yielded Tsou /f/ via Proto-Tsouic **v* while **k* yielded /t/ (Tsuchida 1976). In ATLC the word is derived from PAN **puki* 'vulva', represented in Formosan only by Ami: Tauran *poki* < **puki*, but the only evidence ever presented for the required **mp-* > *b-* shift (Benedict 1976) involves *boki* itself! To make matters worse, PAN **a* regularly yields Tsou /o/ whereas PAN **u* never does (Tsuchida: cit. supra). It is clear, therefore, that in this etymologizing journey we are looking for an early loan source of *baki* shape, the /a/ having yielded Tsou /o/.

Ordinarily a comparativist, even one as given to kinship terminology as I am, would not seek out a 'grandparent' term here. The Formosan languages are not like other languages, I sometimes think, so I made an extra effort here. Atayal *utas* is defined (Egerod 1980) as 'grandfather; father-in-law; ...husband; penis';² the *u-* apparently for the widespread AN/AT **u-* nominal/pronominal marker often found with kinship terms, e.g. PAN/PKD **(?u-)alak* 'child', while *-tas* is comparable with PMP **tata* 'older male relative' (Blust 1980), the final *-s* perhaps a product of the Atayal men's language (P. Li). With this in mind the etymology of Tsou *boki* becomes far less metagrobolizing: the Formosan-only (Atayalic/Paiwanic) root **baki* 'grandfather' (Dyen, updated by P. Li 1992).

¹ Errors are corrected by their makers, boobos (often gleefully) by colleagues; *boki* is a "millerism" (both phonetically and semantically awry).

² Only in Atayal can a man safely call his father-in-law 'prick'!

Blust (1980) reconstructs PAN **aki* 'grandfather', for Formosan citing Tsou **akʔi* 'id.' along with *b-* amputated Sediq and Ami forms for same, but omitting Atayal *akiʔ* 'grandmother'. The Atayal *-ʔ* represents the widespread PAN **-ʔ* suffix (vocalic) with kinship terms, serving here also to explain Tsou *akʔi* for **aʔiʔ* (if regular **k > /ʔ/*).³ Blust (cit. supra) also reconstructs PAN **baqi* 'grandmother' (PMP/Formosan); here Tsou has *baʔi*, again with *b-*.

We need scenarios for all of this: Formosan has innovated the **baki* 'grandfather' form through analogy with **baqi* 'grandmother'⁴, with Paiwanic showing both **aki* and **bakʔi*; Atayalic has diverged: Sediq has retained **baki* and probably also **baqi > paʔi*, unvoicing the initial (< A *p/q*), while Atayal has transsexualized **aki*⁵ ('grandmother', replacing **baqi*) and elevated a basic 'older male relative' term (**u-ta-s*) to 'grandfather', etc., followed by an extension to 'penis'⁶; in Tsouic, Saaroa and Kanakanabu have replaced the **aki ~ *baqi* pair with Formosan **(t-)amu(-an)* 'grandparent/ancestor'⁷ whereas Tsou has retained **aki* but made an early loan from some unidentified Paiwanic source of the **baki (> boki) ~ (*baqi > baʔi)* pair, the former subsequently paralleling Atayal in undergoing genitalization to 'penis', unable to replace *akʔi*. As suggested above, Formosan languages have a way with words. To set the record straight, however, Tsou *boki* has been genitalized but never flipflopped, retaining its essential maleness at all levels.

³ Cf. Tsou *ukʔa < *ukaʔi* 'there is not' (Tsuchida 1976:176).

⁴ One extra-Formosan initial form has been uncovered (Blust): Maloh (SW Kalimantan) *bakiʔ* 'grandfather', apparently a parallel MP development of the kind that can be anticipated; a PAN-level **aki ~ *baki*, the latter maintained in only one of hundreds of MP languages, is far less likely.

⁵ The basic male referent here is confirmed by Jp. *okina* 'old man', Old Jp. *ōkina < *aki* (typically distressed V₁) + *-na* 'suffix of endearment' (cf. *se-na* 'dear man/brother'); the KD cognate: P-Tai/KS **kee^C < *ki-a* shows extension (from **-aʔ*) to 'old/aged (generally)'.

⁶ *ʔutas* 'penis' also in two Sediq dialects: Trowan and Inago, apparently as loans from Atayal, although P. Li has set up **ʔutas* 'penis' at the P-Atayalic level, entailing 'penis' → 'grandfather' in Atayal, an improbable scenario even for Formosan!

⁷ KD shows both the **-a* and **-an* suffixes here: P-Tai **hmu^A < *ʔmu^A < *[t-]mu-a* 'maternal grandfather' (Lao) ~ **hmoon^A < *ʔmoon^A < *[t-]mu-an* 'ancestor of the 4th generation' (Shan/Khamti) while Jp shows both the widespread (in MP) **-i* suffix as well as the specialized **k-* prefix for deceased kin displayed by Atayal (*kʔutas ~ kotas* 'grandfather after he has died'): *kami* '[the ancestors=] the gods', Old Jp. *kami < *kamuy* (cf. the early Ainu loan: *kamiy* 'god'), from **k-amu-i*.

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