

PAUL GERAGHTY (Suva)

Possession in the Fijian Languages

1. Introduction

A continuum of some 300 communalects is spread across Fiji, divided into two major and perhaps 30 minor groupings, 13 in the West and 17 in the East. Western Fijian (WF) languages are those of the western half of the main island of Vitilevu (including Standard Fijian, also called “Bauan”), Vanualevu the second largest island, and the Kadavu, Lomaiviti, and Lau groups belong to Eastern Fijian (EF). By and large, western and eastern languages are not mutually intercomprehensible, sharing only about 60 percent cognates on the 100-word Swadesh list, and in some cases showing significant differences in phonemic inventory. A similar degree of difference prevails among communalects at the extremes within each of the two major divisions. However, there is a great deal of bilingualism, so that many living close to the major boundary are fluent in both a western and an eastern communalect.

There is general agreement among linguists that the Fijian languages are most closely related to the Polynesian languages and Rotuman, with which they form the Central Pacific subgroup of Oceanic, a subgroup of Austronesian. Within the Fiji continuum, certain communalects of northwest Vanualevu and western Vitilevu show a particularly close relationship to Rotuman, while communalects of eastern Vanualevu and Lau show a particularly close relationship with Polynesian languages. This situation has been interpreted as indicating that the Rotuman and Polynesian languages were already partly distinct entities within a Central Pacific dialect chain situated in Fiji before their respective speakers moved to Rotuma and Western Polynesia (Tonga, Samoa, and neighbouring islands). For more details on historical relationships among the Central Pacific languages, see GERAGHTY (1983: 348–382, 1986, 1996) and PAWLEY (1996).

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All other nouns are indirectly possessed, that is, the possessive pronoun is suffixed not to the noun, but to one of a small set of forms which I call “possessive markers” (others have called them “classifiers”) preceding the noun, as in Standard Fijian:

- (7) (na) no-qu vale
 ART pm-my house
 ‘my house’

A unique feature of Western Fijian is that it has lost direct possession for all but a few kin terms, and in the small communalect of Tubai (Serua) direct possession has been lost altogether (GERAGHTY 1983: 221–226). Historically, it appears that a possessive marker *e-* (*me-* in Waya) came to mark inalienability, without a preceding article, and that all part-of-whole nouns and some kin terms that had previously been directly possessed were switched to this form of indirect possession. The marker *e-* has now been lost in many contexts:

**na ulu-qu* ‘my head’ > *e-qu ulu* > (*e*)*qu ulu*

**na ulu-drau* ‘their (dual) heads’ > *e-ru ulu*

**na noqu bō* ‘my boil’ > *e-qu bō* > (*e*)*qu bō*

LYNCH (1997: 237) has used the term “direct possession” for this kind of WF possession, but I view it as a kind of indirect possession, because of its morphology and its being determined semantically, not lexically. The perception of it as “direct” is no doubt due to it having been called (by myself and others) “prefixed possession”, but this is not strictly correct, since particles may intervene, e.g.:

- (8) *e-ru* duku ulu
 pm-their each head
 ‘their respective heads’

4. Possessive markers

As a result of ongoing research, I am now able to supply more details as to the form and distribution of possessive markers in Fiji. More details of their allomorphy and semantics can be found in GERAGHTY (1983: 241–251, general survey), PAWLEY/SAYABA (1990) for Waya (WF), GERAGHTY (in press) for Nadroga (WF), PAWLEY (1980) for Nabukelevu, Kadavu (EF), DIXON (1988) for Bouma, Taveuni (EF), and SCHÜTZ (1985) for Standard Fijian (EF). Note

'thing' (Kadavu *na ere levu*, Standard Fijian *na kā levu*), while in the Cakaudrove area a special article is used, e.g. Vuna *kamu levu*. Another means of specification is with ordinal numerals, e.g. 'the second one': WF *e ikarua*, Standard Fijian *na ke-na ikarua*, Lau *a o-na ikarua*.

GENERAL: Some areas showing *le-* (WF) have *li-* or *lo-* allomorphs, which appear to be phonologically conditioned; *la-* is found in Nalea and Navatusila (WF, central Vitilevu), and not Savatu as previously reported; while *ya-* is found in Vunaniu, a small WF communalect on the Serua coast, quite closely related to Tubai. This last could be a regular reflex of PCP¹ *ʔa-, *a-, or *ña-, or a reflex of *la- which is irregular, but found in other words (*yaka* 'go'), and also in Tubai (GERAGHTY 1983: 179–180). All areas showing *no-* have an allomorph *ne-* or *ni-*, and all showing *o-* have an allomorph *we-* or *wi-*, in both cases before a high front vowel (though not always restricted to this environment). In much of central Vanualevu, including Macuata, Seqaqa, and Wailevu, there is a zero allomorph of *o-*, while ʔo- is found in the Labasa area. The irregular first person singular form *qou* (perhaps a metathesis of regular *o-qu*) is found in Vanuabalavu and Lau. The form *ne-* is also found in Koroalau, northeast Vanualevu, and was still being used by old women of Bau 60 years ago (CAPELL 1941). Macuata and Seqaqa (central Vanualevu) use *loga-* when the noun is deleted: *e o-na vale* 'it's his house', *e loga-na* 'it's his (house etc.)'.

FOOD: Some areas have irregular forms for the first person singular: Waya *qiau* (since *qiau* is the regular first singular suffix, this is in effect a zero allomorph); Wainikeli, Bouma (Taveuni) *qakayau* (/k/ is realised as glottal stop); Dravuni (Kadavu), Rewa, Bau, Verata, Gau, Koro, Vuna, Cakaudrove, and all of Lau *qau*.

DRINK: The irregular form *meqau* for the first person singular occurs in Cakaudrove, Taveuni, Mualevu (Vanuabalavu), and Ono (Lau) – a distribution which suggests that it was formerly more widespread.

SPECIAL: In GERAGHTY (1983: 250–251) I described thus a possessive marker restricted to most of Eastern Vitilevu and part of Ovalau: "The possessor contributes the head noun, particularly as a customary obligation – a mat or pig for presentation at a feast, a house being built for a chief, or a spade to be used in a communal garden project". The form and distribution are as follows: *loga-* Namosi, Suva, Naitasiri, Kuku, Namara, Waidina, Lomaivuna, Waima, Wainimala, Nabobuco, Nadrau; *laga-* Vugalei, Naimasimasi, Tai, Waimaroiwai, Namena, Taivugalei, Lutu, Wainibuka, Nalawa, Nakorotubu, Saivou, Naigani, Lovoni. These areas approximate to the provinces of Namosi and Naitasiri (*loga-*), and Nadrau, Tailevu, Ra, and a small part of Lomaiviti (*laga-*).

The above definition can now be expanded to include loads carried for someone else (a very common use), fish caught and produce brought in from fields or the forest, and in some

5. Totems and possession

In all of Western Fiji, most of eastern Vitilevu, and part of Ovalau, kin-groups are distinguished by totems – mostly trees and plants or cultivars, but also animals, birds, fish, or other fauna, and rarely non-animates such as sand, water, or rocks. Each kin-group has between one and four totems, with one more salient than the others. In some kin-groups with moieties, which are mostly situated inland Vitilevu, each moiety has its own totem or totems. Some people may not eat their totem, others may eat theirs provided they do not injure it (e.g., breadfruit may not be peeled or cored, or prawns shelled), while yet others eat theirs freely. Visitors may not normally utter the name of the totem, or show any disrespect towards it, such as sitting on a breadfruit leaf, on pain of a beating or dunking or (more commonly these days) being required to drink an enormous bowl of kava or provide valuables such as kava root, food, or drums of kerosene. The name of the totem is also used to refer to the genitalia of the kin-group members, and children typically learn the “totem” word for genitalia long before they acquire the more general terms.

In part of northeast Vitilevu (Nadrau-Nabobuco, Nalawa, Nakorotubu, Wainibuka, Wainimala, Namena) the ‘special’ marker *loga-/laga-* (discussed in the previous section) is also used for totems, as in:

- (9) *Sa mavoā na laga-na vadrā.*
 ASP injured ART pm-his pandanus
 ‘His genitalia are injured.’

where the referent’s totem is the pandanus, or elliptically:

- (10) *A cava na laga-mudou?*
 ART what ART pm-you (paucal)
 ‘What is your group’s totem?’

In Western Fijian, on the other hand, totems are marked by part possession, as in:

- (11) *e kulu*
 pm-his breadfruit
 ‘his genitalia’

where the referent’s totem is the breadfruit, which contrasts with *le-a kulu* ‘the breadfruit he owns’ and *ke-a kulu* ‘the breadfruit he eats’.

These usages are particularly striking examples of how possessive markers can alter the connotation of the possessed noun.

gest an alternative origin which is in keeping with, and so strengthens, the Tokalau-Fiji hypothesis.

Both Rotuman and Polynesian possessive marker sets derive from an area where the general marker was *-o or *-ʔo rather than *no-. Today, *o-* is found in most of Vanualevu, most of Koro, and all of northern and southern Lau. LYNCH (1997: 239) has raised the possibility that *o-* also occurred in Kadavu, on the basis of the disassociation of *no-* with the article *na*, but the argument is weakened by the fact that the article is obligatory under ellipsis: 'mine' (house etc.) is *na no-qu*, not **no-qu*. On the other hand, *ʔo-* is far less common, occurring only in the Labasa area of Vanualevu (GERAGHTY 1983: 256–258). Since the initial glottal stop is certainly required for Rotuman and possibly also for Proto Polynesian, it is most likely that both markers originated in Vanualevu. In Proto Polynesian it merged with the PCP glottal stop, while in Vanualevu and Rotuma it merged with the glottal stop that developed from **k* after the loss of PCP glottal stop.

Drink possession (**me-*) may have merged with eat (**xa-*) at an early stage, though the change, being common in Oceanic languages, could also have occurred later independently in Polynesian and Rotuman.

In the next stage, direct possession for inalienables (except some kin terms) was replaced by indirect general possession marked by *(*ʔ*)*o-*. This change is still shown in the Gonedau languages, which include Macuata-i-wai in central Vanualevu, and appear to be a relic area (GERAGHTY 1983: 222–223, 321). In other parts of Vanualevu it has been lost, presumably through the pervasive influence of the languages of the Southeast Vitilevu prestige area, from which today's Standard Fijian derives (GERAGHTY 1983: 383–384, 386). As was the case with the parallel change in Western Fijian, the resulting NP was not marked by an article (in WF, the article is absent with all inalienables, even when *ke-* possessed; witness examples in GERAGHTY 1983: 243).

Next, in part of Vanualevu, the general marker *(*ʔ*)*o-* was deleted after the article **a*, as is still the case in Seqaqa and Wailevu in central Vanualevu. The article **a* was then reanalysed as a marker (**a-*), and subsequently merged with the eat/drink marker **ʔa-*, yielding the Proto Polynesian marker set (LYNCH 1997: 231, 36):

	most inalienables	general	eat/drink
post-PCP	<i>N-</i>	(<i>ʔ</i>) <i>o-</i>	<i>ʔa-</i>
Tokalau-Pn	<i>ʔo-</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>ʔa-</i>
PPn	<i>ʔo-</i>	<i>ʔa-</i>	<i>ʔa-</i>

Note that a trace of the earlier Tokalau-Polynesian *ʔa-* eat marker survives in the irregular first person singular form *qau*, a metathesis of **a-qu*, found in Tokalau Fijian and other parts

Vanualevu is thus the only part of Fiji where are to be found the three prerequisites for the Polynesian marker set: glottal stop initial general marker, loss of direct possession for most inalienables, and loss of general marker after the article. It is also noteworthy that Labasa shows vowel assimilation in the article (GERAGHTY 1983: 256–258) similar to that reconstructed for Proto Polynesian by WILSON (1982: 74). Vanualevu therefore remains the most likely location for the origin of the Polynesian languages as a distinct entity.

7. Another marker?

I would now like to consider the possibility that another marker existed in PCP. The EF (Vitilevu) marker *loga-/laga-*, loosely glossed ‘special’, has roughly three domains of meaning: totem, product, and personal possession. In parts of Vanualevu, *loga-* is also synonymous with the general marker when the possessed noun is deleted. As far as I am able to judge from the available material, the *bula-/pila-* possessive marker of north Vanuatu has similar domains. It is usually glossed as marking ‘prized possession, e.g. pig’, but in at least some languages it has broader reference: in Tolomako it is also used with knife (TRYON 1973: 317), and in Raga with night (as the creation of a god), food, plants, domestic animals, possessions, etc. (YOSHIOKA 1987). It is also used in some languages for gardens (CODRINGTON 1895: 131), and as an allomorph of the general marker (CODRINGTON 1895: 445) in what appears to be a similar context to *loga-* in Vanualevu.

There is, however, little similarity of form between *bula-/pila-* and *loga-/laga-*, so it is not possible to reconstruct a PEO² marker from which they can both be derived. But if reconstruction is not possible, the question arises: why did Northern Vanuatu and Eastern Fiji independently innovate possessive markers with not one but two very similar functions?

8. Postscript

The following entry appeared in the first published Fijian dictionary (HAZLEWOOD 1850): *Maurimu*, a word of blessing, used by the priests when people take a thing to a bure kalou [temple].

and was reproduced word-for-word in CAPELL’s (1941) dictionary with an indication that the word was by then obsolete. So indeed it may have been in Standard Fijian, but it is still current in at least the communalect of Nabobuco (EF, central Vitilevu), where it serves as a general, and secular, word of thanks or blessing, and also as the name of an important tra-

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PAUL GERAGHTY
 Institute of Fijian Language and Culture
 Government Buildings
 Suva, Fiji
 Tel: 21 14 51