

Potentials of a Fijian Language Exhibition Based on Fijian GIS Data

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10. Potentials of a Fijian Language Exhibition Based on Fijian GIS Data

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Abstract

The Fijian Language GIS Project has a potential for disseminating scientific research results to the general public. While Fijian people are aware that there are different communalects of Fijian spoken all over Fiji, there is no place where information based on linguistics is available. What kind of information will be useful for local people and how that could be exhibited is discussed through a local researcher's eye.

10.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the need for an exhibition on the Fijian languages from the viewpoint of a native speaker researcher who was born and has lived in local communities.

The Fijian languages include the standard Fijian (hereafter “SF”) which is one of the official languages in Fiji along with English and Hindi.¹⁾ English is an official language and almost all the people learn English either as their first, or a second language. The Fiji Bureau of Statistics does not have data on the linguistic demography of Fiji, however it can be assumed that the different ethnic groups speak their ethnic languages or dialects. Regarding the population of the major ethnic groups, the National Census in 2007 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics) reports that there are 475,739 (56.8%) iTaukei Fijians (indigenous Fijians), 313,798 (37.5%) Fiji Indians, or those whose ancestors came from South Asia during the colonial era, and 10,335 (1.2%) Rotumans. Based on this information, it can be inferred that varieties of the Fijian language are spoken by approximately 56.8% of the population in Fiji. In addition, Fijian languages are spoken by those who live abroad, the main countries being New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain and the United States of America. The Fijian communities outside of Fiji celebrate Fijian-language week and host related Fijian cultural events in the area of their residence.

SF is referred to as *Vosavakaviti* ‘Fijian language’ in Fijian. It has also been labeled *Vosavakaviti Raraba* “common Fijian language” in *Vakadidike Vosavakaviti*, a textbook for a Fijian Linguistics course at The University of the South Pacific, indicating that it is the variety that is generally used by Fijian-speaking people rather than one related to a geographical area. More recently, the Fijian government changed the official name of SF

from “Fijian” to iTaukei (Fiji Government 2010). Other languages of the Fijian languages are regional varieties, which are referred to in this volume as “communalects.” In addition to the three official languages, Rotuman, a completely different language from Fijian, is spoken in Rotuma, the northern most island in Fiji.

SF is originally based on *Vosavakabau* ‘Bauan language,’ a communalect spoken by the people of Bau Island. It is one of the languages used for nation-wide broadcasting, television and education today. SF is also a school subject, both in primary and secondary schools, and there are courses on Fijian language studies at local universities for those who are planning to become school teachers.

Both *Vosavakaviti* ‘Fijian language’ and *Vosavakabau* ‘Bauan language’ are often used referring to SF in Fiji. However, it is important to recognize that they are two different varieties. While they commonly share many characteristics, there are also those that distinguish them. The history is that early missionaries visiting Fiji from Europe converted the chief of Bau to Christianity as a pathway to convert the people of Bau. For that, they used the local language in Bau, but mixed it with some characteristics of a few other communalects, including those spoken in Lau, Viwa, Rewa, and Taveuni. Thus, SF can be described as a mixture of various Fijian dialects based on the Bau variety, rather than being equal to Bauan. However, there is currently no place where their exact similarities and differences are explained for lay people.

In Fiji, it is now recognized that there are about 300 communalects spoken in the country (Chapters 2 and 5 this volume). It would be good if an exhibition about these 300 communalects, along with the difference between SF and Bauan, can be established in Fiji. I consider that such would be a big contribution to the community based on the outcome of the Fijian Language GIS Project. Such an exhibit would be a good place for informing, educating and entertaining the speakers themselves, and also learners of Fijian languages. In addition, I expect that such an exhibit would give both tourists and long term visitors to Fiji (such as Peace Corp volunteers and tourists) accurate information on facts about the language situation in Fiji.

10.2. Background: Research in Fiji and Its Social Dissemination

Fijian languages are those that have been inherited from an ancestral population who first arrived in Fiji about 1000 BC (Lynch 1998: 76). They contain rich information not only about the language and culture of Fiji, but properly analyzed, they also serve as an important window into the prehistory of Fiji (see Chapter 6). In short, Fijian languages are an intangible cultural heritage. There have been many years of documentation, analyses, and palaeo-archaeological studies on the languages. The result of these are published by early European “discoverers,” traders, beachcombers, missionaries, officials of the colonial and post-colonial government (see Chapter 2). Linguists, who include but a limited number of native speakers, have also produced documentation on some communalects, such as Wayan (Pawley and Sayaba 1971, 1990), Nadrau (Kikusawa 2001), Kadavu (see References in Chapter 8), Vatulele (Chapter 3 in this volume), and the whole area (Geraghty 1983), to name a few. However, information on the value of the existing languages is currently almost exclusively

shared by academia and students who major in relevant fields.

Sources that are currently available for public-educational viewing, appreciation, and/or critique are listed in Table 10-1. The television and radio programs listed in Table 10-1 have been quite popular among the general public. However, apart from the radio program, these are one-off productions and therefore, cannot be considered continuous information resources. On the other hand, a museum exhibition would stay available for longer times, making them available for school excursions, educational tours, and other visits, thus benefitting the broader audience better.

Table 10-1 Materials in Fijian languages available to the general public in Fiji

| MEDIA | TITLE | PRODUCER |
|------------|--|--------------------|
| radio | <i>Bogi ni Tusiti ena walu</i> ‘Tuesday nights at 8’ | Radio Fiji |
| TV | <i>Vueta na vosa</i> ‘Raising the language’ | FijiTV |
| DVD (play) | <i>Lakovi</i> ‘Marriage proposal’ | iTaukei Trust Fund |
| DVD (play) | <i>Keteketeqe</i> ‘The basket of soil’ | iTaukei Trust Fund |
| DVD (play) | <i>Na iLululu</i> ‘Handshake’ | iTaukei Trust Fund |

Currently, there is no scientific information available of the languages, neither at the Fiji Museum, or any of the three Universities in Fiji. At the Museum in particular, there are exhibits of Lapita pottery, which are the result of archaeological findings connecting Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The findings have been followed up in the field of historical linguistics which eventually clarified the genetic relationships of the Austronesian languages, which include Fijian. Although the spread of Austronesian-speaking people in the Pacific, the Pacific rims and in Madagascar has been clarified based on language data, there is no place where this is explained to the general public.

10.3. Language Education in Fiji

With the recent development of social media, young people are now creating their own videos of dance, jokes, recipes, and stories and sharing them on public pages. These have started to provide a kind of “storage” of different Fijian language varieties. The languages used there are typically a mixture of SF, English and local varieties of Fijian, or “communalects.” Social media is an avenue where many young people are being creative using the variety of languages that are spoken in Fiji including SF which is used for education and is taught as a school subject.

The majority of Fijian people living in Fiji acquire their mother tongue and first language naturally through transmission from members of their family and the local community. They start schooling in kindergartens at the age of five. At the pre-school level and in rural areas, the vernacular language is used, which may be a communalect of Fijian, or SF, Hindi or Rotuman. In urban areas, the language of education is English and this is most practical, as children attending school in urban areas may have different first languages.

The formal learning of SF for Fijian speakers, Hindi for Hindi speakers, as a school subject starts in the first year of primary school as part of the national curriculum and it is compulsory for schools to offer Fijian and Hindi. Two new subjects, Conversational Fijian and Conversational Hindi, are now offered at primary school for students who do not speak either of the languages at home. English, being one of the official languages of Fiji, is the main international language of the region, and is the lingua franca in Fiji. It is a compulsory subject at schools and is the main medium of instruction for all other subjects.

In essence, all students learn English at schools, and in addition, take Fijian or Hindi. It is therefore not uncommon that there is a lot of code-switching between SF and English among Fijian speaking people (Tamata 1996). Fijian speakers also use many loanwords from other languages, including Hindi (Tamata 2003). In the past, English was the only compulsory subject and also the language to be used at school. At some schools, students used to be punished when they spoke in their own communalect during school hours and in the school premises. Such punishment included pulling out weeds in the school yard and having a cardboard hanging on one's neck with the words saying that "speaking in Fijian is not allowed."

While SF is taught at schools, local varieties of the language are not. It would be good if non-SF Fijian varieties are to be included as well so that people could understand the differences between SF and their own communalect objectively and have more appreciation for their own language. This would have to be done using appropriate pedagogy and with the appropriate level of content for different age groups. For this, applied linguistic analyses are necessary but are currently lacking in the field of Fijian linguistics. Regardless of the subfield, it is a fact that there are a limited number of local linguists in Fiji. More interest and appreciation of the languages may help and encourage more people to become qualified linguists. This need is recognized by The University of the South Pacific and a new program in the Postgraduate Diploma in Fijian Language Studies has just been established. The new development will lead to the master and doctorate levels as required. However, language development for Fijian is externally funded by the iTaukei Trust Fund Board.

10.4. Multilingualism in Fiji

SF is often described as the language spoken by the indigenous people of Fiji. It should be noted that, typically, people are bidialectal between their own communalect and SF. Those who live in both villages and cities, such as Suva, are bidialectal. This is apart from being bilingual between English and SF.

There are those who have migrated to New Zealand, Australia, England and the USA. In such cases, people usually keep SF and their own communalect as their identity languages, while they also use the language of the country (or the community) where they reside.

A variety of Fijian is also spoken in areas in Fiji where people live that migrated from outside of Fiji. For example, people in Rabi Island originally came from Kiribati and maintain the Kiribati language as well. The inhabitants of Kioa Island are originally from Tuvalu and maintain Tuvaluan while speaking the local variety of Fijian. In addition, there are those whose ancestors migrated to Fiji from outside of Oceania, such as China and

India. Their descendants often maintain the language of origin of their ancestors, while also speaking English and the local Fiji-Hindi koiné (Lynch 1988) or Chinese Fijian pidgin.

Scenarios depicting the development of each non-Fijian language spoken in Fiji, including such background information about their stories and journeys to Fiji, would broaden the understanding of language and build familiar and trusting relationships among the speakers of the different languages. If an exhibition about Fijian languages is to be created, a section on multilingualism showing the various languages spoken in Fiji would be a good addition.

10.5. Language Change and Language Maintenance

Languages change. However, it appears to be a common assumption among Fijian people that language is a utility that is used without realizing that languages and communalects change over time. The state of a language during a particular era would indicate contacts with speakers of other languages, names of introduced goods and other social changes in the society (Kikusawa 2012).

Language undergoes changes when speakers adapt to a changed reality and take on new vocabulary. If speakers were to be conservative, change in behavior and language use would not be as fast. Currently, I have a feeling that Fijian speakers are incorporating SF and English rather positively, and thus enhancing more rapid change in each communalect than it would be otherwise. Becoming aware of language change and the various causes of language change may give an opportunity for people to stop and think about the consequences. Being aware of the value of the local communalects as a mark of identity may motivate people to maintain their own language. The passion for matters relating to land ownership should be the same as the people's passion for their own communalects. Although borrowing of words and adopting popular words from young people nevertheless happen, as such is the nature of language, the awareness of it could give the speakers more choices for the future of their own language.

In order to see the need to maintain a language, speakers ought to be aware of and gain knowledge about their indigenous language. This recommendation comes in the wake of the realization that indigenous people ought to be vigilant about preserving and maintaining their culture, values and resources, and also amidst the push for development and individualistic pursuits in the villages (*Na Sauvaki ni Vanua* 2017). Taking ownership of their language would require that community leaders be more active in safeguarding their language and culture. In Fiji's case, traditional leaders and chiefs would realize dialect boundaries and differences. Leaders should be able to maintain the language and culture features that define them. Knowing one's language or dialect well is a big step towards language maintenance and safeguarding knowledge and identity. The knowledge of owning a language, including its history and stories, are sources of unity and pride in a language exhibition (Tamata 2016).

10.6. Language Features for Educational Awareness

As mentioned in 10.3, many Fijian speakers grow up to be a speaker of the language spoken in their local community and may not know the language spoken in their inherited clan or chiefdom. They have grown up in another location, perhaps in their mother's village, the parent's place of work, or have chosen to resettle elsewhere especially in urban areas. Hence their first language may not be the same communalect as their *vosanivanua* 'ancestral language' or 'tribal language.'

Regardless of where parents live and work, children typically acquire the communalects or the language variety of the place. The variety acquired is also influenced by the church that one's family attends, the language used by house helpers and nannies if both parents work and the language used by close members of the extended family. Schools also play a part in the language variety young people end up speaking as there are both rural and urban government schools, different churches and religions, and there are also community-governed schools. It is in schools and churches that Fijian children learn SF, if at home they speak a communalect. Depending on the combination of one's language environment, children grow up being familiar with up to five communalects. Describing scenarios such as the above to displaying communalect maps, language use, language choices, language change, language contact and language acquisition at an exhibit could contribute to an awareness of multidialectal contexts and multilingualism. This could trigger people's interest not only to simple differences and similarities of their languages, but also notions of language and identity and how they would like to safeguard their ancestral languages. The following describes my own history as to how I encountered different communalects.

Growing up, I did not acquire the communalect of my father and our clan and tribe, the *Vosavaka Nasarowaqa* 'the communalect of Nasarowaqa,' which is my *vosanivanua* 'ancestral language.' I later investigated the communalect in my thesis (Tamata 2007). My parents were from different provinces, had different mother-tongues and since my father was a civil servant and worked in a number of other provinces, we were exposed to the Nadroga and the Ra communalects. At home, we spoke a variety that included *VosavakaTailevu* that my mother spoke and the Fijian vocabulary used in the Catholic church. With my siblings and maternal cousins however, we spent a good number of our early education years in Catholic boarding schools. Needless to say, we also grew up learning a Natovi version of a number of Tailevu communalects including *VosavakaBurelevu*, a place we lived close to. I grew up hearing and speaking SF as it was used at school. The language that I spoke included lexical and some grammatical features of other communalects that my classmates used. From eighth grade, it was considered beneficial for all eighth graders to enter boarding life so that we could prepare well for the national eighth year exam. Boarding life exposed us to more varieties of the languages spoken by the more popular students. These included the communalects of Navunisolé in Tailevu province, Ucunivanua in Verata, Soa in Ra province and even a Taveuni dialect. Alongside adopting features of the other communalects, we began using particular characteristics of other communalects that we thought sounded unique and made them popular. For instance, one of the sounds of the Taveuni and Soa communalects, and not in SF and many other communalects, is glottal

stop [ʔ] as shown in (1) and (2) below. Many of us thought it was “cool” to include such a sound in our own talk and started to include the glottal stop to replace [t] and [k].

- (1) Soa: [ʔoro yani] for *toro yani* ‘to shift up’
- (2) Taveuni: [a ʔāʔana] for *na kākana* ‘the food’

The form *ʔoroyani* or *ʔoroi* is still in the variety I use today in my family. A large number of indigenous Fijians grow up in boarding schools and share similar situations speaking a “lect” that included characteristics from other students’ dialects. In adult life, I have learned to speak my husband’s Lawaki dialect of the Nakasaleka communalect that is geographically based in Kadavu. The Lawaki dialect is the dominant variety used at home and with his family and village folks. Since the Fijian custom is patrilineal, it is a family norm for children to be exposed to and acquire their father’s language, generally speaking. There are also many cases where children are exposed to both of their parents’ dialects.

Each communalect is a *vosanivanua* ‘ancestral language’ or a *vosanisusu* ‘first language’ of someone. For many, the communalect is the same one. Knowing and using the *vosanivanua* is a source of pride to its speakers, adding to the feeling of identity and patriotism as speakers of the same dialect and of the same village or geographical location. This knowledge of dialect features and identity is critical as a number of indigenous Fijians have grown up speaking SF fluently rather than their own dialect. The linguistically disadvantaged speakers feel a vacuum when and where it matters in the communication spectrum. Sometimes people also acquire only a passive knowledge of their own *vosanivanua* because of having to grow up in places other than their home villages. As Fijians become aware of their language bases and communication journeys, they may be able to make choices to shape the language capabilities of their children, families and eventually descendants. In Fiji today and with Fijians abroad, identity in terms of language and culture has become an area of grave concern.

To show such values and unique characteristics of each communalect, the following are recommended for display in the exhibit.

- i) The metalanguage of Fijian
- ii) Distinctive phonological differences of the communalects of Fijian
- iii) Main lexical differences of the communalects of Fijian
- iv) The *Na iVolavosa Vakaviti* (The Fijian Monolingual Dictionary 2005)
- v) Connections between language, culture and heritage, and history of Fiji
- vi) The language situation in Fiji including multilingualism and multidialectalism

10.7. Exhibition Context

Since 2019, The iTaukei Trust Fund Board (TTFB) has been developing and planning for a Cultural Centre. Unique characteristics of each *vanua* ‘world’ of chiefdoms in Fiji would form the content of exhibitions. In each *vanua*, there is a chief who holds leadership of the social structure of the community. Each community consists of clans who communally work

together for the common good of the chieftom and its people. The TTFB has been conducting fieldwork to identify unique cultural and linguistic features of each *vanua*. These are found to correlate with the people's reverence for their head chief. The community gives the best produce from their own ecosystems and environment to their chief. These include fish and other marine organisms from their coastal waters, plants that signify royalty and the best crops from the land (Tamata 2018). For example, the fisherman clan of Naivilaca village in Rewa is known as the turtle harvester for the chief of Noco, a chieftom in the province. It is therefore important that coastal areas traditionally marked as fishing or harvesting grounds and their surrounding environment, taboos and related protocol be included in any exhibition, as they give the place and people character and significance in a close-knit *vanua* or community.

The cultural knowledge and technical language that signifies a *vanua* would also make exciting and informative content to an exhibition. The 'iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture' of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs holds the database to this wealth of knowledge. Relevant research taking place in universities could also share their findings in the exhibition. For instance, "Navigating the Weather,"²² a research project currently undertaken shows that the navigation skill of *cavu* 'shunting' is a skill unique to Fiji. Because traditional knowledge topics such as navigation, hunting and cultivation are becoming less used due to there being more modern and convenient methods, the associated language for the knowledge and skills are losing their use, place and relevance in the traditional expertise spectrum.

We are considering that exhibits about Fijian language could be in the same cultural center space providing information on the *vanua* communalects and their unique features. Having looked at and inspired by the language exhibit at the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan (Minpaku), and seeing that a Fijian GIS is being developed, an interactive language map and a guide to related publications would entice visitors to the cultural center. Interactive and digital exhibitions would attract young people, in particular, sound and video materials must be included. An exhibit where the same story told in different communalects, such as the exhibit of the Peach-boy Story at Minpaku (Kikusawa 2019), would also attract people. The *vanua* for instance have creation stories or stories of respected and feared ancestors that remain in the *vanua* folk package. Fijians relate to these and would frequent the cultural center for resources on language, culture and identity. Fijians and visitors alike look to the planned cultural center of the iTaukei Trust Fund for inspiring, informative and insightful exhibitions.

10.8. Learning Resource for Fijian People Living Outside of the Community

The outcomes of the Fijian exhibition would not be limited to the local Fijian speaking population. As mentioned in 10.4, many Fijians live abroad today and participate in language and cultural events in their new communities. Information developed as part of the Fijian language exhibition would also prove vital and practical for their use as well. Resources currently offered or are being developed include the Fijian language studies program at USP, on-line language and culture educational programs for the purpose and use of Fijians in diaspora communities, publications and language and culture courses for our clan title

holders. TTFB is collecting its ‘objects’ as one would say in museum terminology.

10.9. Concluding Remarks

Linguistic and cultural information on Fijian language and dialects are significant sources of information that ought to form the content of exhibitions. They would be great learning tools for Fijian speakers and also researchers to learn about the Fijian language as opposed to learning to speak the language. I refer particularly to the need for the general public and educational tours that frequent the museum in Fiji and the on cultural center that is being developed to be aware of information regarding their language and dialects. Visiting groups have also included university class groups and women and youth groups of various communities.

Information language and culture adds to the confirmation of identity, acknowledging ancestral spaces, land and chiefdoms, ownership and taking responsibility to safeguard against language and culture erosion. Visual and graphically displayed dialect maps that include interactive features provide much to give visitors an appreciation and experience. They also allow for intergenerational engagement and learning where the actual traditional learning spaces have become inaccessible.

Having approximately 300 Fijian dialects, the reasons for having numerous dialects, a standard Fijian dialect, contact Fijian dialects or pidgins, would make interesting exhibition stories. If these stories characterize a multilingual Fiji, then a language exhibition is appropriate to artistically portray the language context and also to share knowledge.

Notes

- 1) It was referred to as “Hindustani” in the 1997 Constitution, however, it is changed to “Hindi” in the 2013 Constitution. In academic contexts, it is often referred to as “Fiji Hindi.”
- 2) By Collin Philp of *Uto ni Yalo*, Candide Simard and myself at USP.

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