Verb Systems in Fijian

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1 Introduction

This paper reports verb system in Fijian. Especially, this paper describes three points: split-ergativity, verbal suffixes, tenses and aspects in Fijian. The data that is used in this report derives from past books on Fijian grammar and elicitations from a male Fijian speaker done in spring of 2019.

2 Split-ergativity

According to Milner (1972), the verbs in Fijian are intransitive, but they can become transitive by adding transitive forms which let them to have an object. In the example (1), the verb gunu 'drink' is intransitive in the first sentence, it has not an object, but in the second sentence de suffix -va has been added and then the object na yagona 'cava'. Milner (1972) claims the transitive particles are not the same regarding the object; they change if the object is common or proper.

(1) Eratou gunu yaqona 'they are cava-drinking' Eratou gunava na yaqona 'they drink cava'

Regarding the particles use with common objects, Milner (1972) points out they can be a suffix or a suffix and a prefix added to the base at the same time. When the particle is just a suffix it can have one or two syllables. There is no rule to indicate what suffixes are added to a base.

The suffixes of one syllable are: -a, -ca, -ga, -ka, -ma, -na, -ra, -ta, -va, -ya. The suffixes of two syllables are: -caka, -kaka, -laka, -maka, -naka, -raka, -taka, -vaka, and -yaka. These suffixes can be added to the base alone or with a prefix.

According to Schütz (2014), Fijian transitivity is related with the notion of specificity. The author exemplifies, between others, with this sentence: *era rai ci* 'they were seen', where *era* is the subject, *rai* is the verb, and *ci* is the transitive suffix. In this case, the transitive suffix is not followed by an object, thus, the subject represents the goal (p. 133). Even though the actor is not explicit, it is known that the action was caused by an actor

In the data set analyzed in this report, the following sentences with the intransitive verb and the same verb with the suffixes -a and -na have been elicited. When the suffixes of one syllable -a and -na are added, the verbs become transitive:

(2) [e lokhi na khaukhamea ngo] 'this metal is bent' [e lokhia na khaukhamea ngo na ðaulaβau] 'the youth is bending this metal' [e thawa na kholo ngo] 'this village is inhabited' [e thawana na kholo ngo na βulani] 'strangers live in this village'

In (2b), the suffix -a is added to loki 'bending' and then comes the object na kaukamea qo 'this metal'. In (2d), -na is added to the verb tawa 'live' and then the object na koro qo 'this village'. In both sentences, the object has the same form of the intransitive subject: na kaukamea qo is an intransitive subject in (2a) and the object in (2b), also na koro qo is an intransitive subject in (2d) and the object in (2d).

Coon (2013) claims that in an ergative language the subject of an intransitive verb is the same with the object of a transitive verb, thus, the subject of the transitive and intransitive verb are differents. In fact, the subject in (2a) is *na kaukamea qo* 'this metal' and the subject of the transitive verb in (2b) is *na caulavau* 'the youth'.

In the next sentences, the suffixes added to the verb are -ta and -va. The first one is added to the verb dre 'pulling', and the second one to the verb lako 'go':

a. [e ndre na ðaulaβau] 'the youth is pulling'
b. [e ndreta na wanga na ðaulaβau] 'the youth is pulling the boat'
c. [e lakho na maṭama] 'the woman is going'
d. [e lakhoβa na sukha na maṭama] 'the woman is going for sugar'

In these sentences the transitive subject and the intransitive subject are the same. In (3a), *na caulavau* 'the youth' is the intransitive subject, and in (3b) also *na caulavau* is the subject, even though it is a transitive subject. The same situation occurs with *na marama* in (3d) and (3d). According to the Lexicase framework, "(...) an accusative language has a system in which Nom (the Nominative case form) coincides with the [actr] (actor) of the verb." (Kikusawa, 2002:16). In these sentences, the actor coincides with the nominative.

Considering (3), Fijian is an ergative language, but if sentences in (3) are analyzed Fijian is an accusative language. In terms of Dixon (1994), this is a case of ergative split.

3 Verbal Suffixes

This section shows that Fijian verbal suffixes differ depending on the type of objects. In Japanese or English, verbs do not change its forms based on the following objects.

- (4) a. Mary saw a book.
 - b. Mary saw them.
- (5) a. Mary-ga hon-o mita.

 Mary-Non book-Acc saw
 b. Mary-ga karera-o mita.

 Mary-Non them-Acc saw

(4) and (5) demonstrate examples of English and Japanese respectively. Both of them show that the verb forms are consistent. However, in Fijian, those verb endings depend on what type of nouns is the object of a verb as shown in (6).

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(6) a. He saw it e a aíða:
b. She saw them (pl.) e aíði ia
c. He saw it e a aíði aí
d. They (pl.) were seen ea aíði
e. He saw it e saí aíða:
f. He will see it e saí na aíða:
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One of the main difference between (6a) and (6b) is the type of objects. (6a) shows the verb has a suffix "a" when the object is "it", whereas (6b) indicates the verb gets a suffix "i" when the object is "them". The same pattern can be observed in (6c,d). Based on these observations, the basic patterns are as follows;

(7) a. when the object is pronoun (him, her, them, etc...) \rightarrow the suffix is "i"

b. when the object is other elements \rightarrow the suffix is "a"

Next, patterns in (7) are applied to the examples in (8).

(8) a. She saw water *e aiði na wai
b. She saw them (pl.) *e aiði ia
c. She saw them (tr.) e aiði iaathou

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She saw this
                                      e jaiða ngo
    She saw this
e.
                                     *e μαίδi ηgo
f.
    She saw Tai
                                      e jaiði (*o) <u>t</u>ai
    Tai saw something
                                      e jaiða o tai ("o" marks the following subject)
h.
    Someone saw them
                                      jaiði ija
    Did you see him yesterday?
                                      o a: Jaiði khoja e na noa?
j.
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The examples in (8) have several types of objects other than pronouns. For instance, a general noun, a demonstrative noun and a proper noun. (8a) indicates that the general noun *wai* "water" cannot be marked by a suffix "i". However, the proper noun *tai* "Tai" in (8f) cannot be marked with "a". This implies that different suffixes are used for refering to general nouns and proper nouns. Moreover, when the object is a demonstrative noun this as shown in (8e, f), the verb has a suffix "a". Based on the findings from (8), the patterns in (7) can be improved as follows;

- (9) a. when the object is pronouns or general nouns → the suffix is "i"
 b. when the object is proper nouns or demonstrative pronouns → the suffix is "a"
- This section has shown that there are two types of verbal suffixes. These suffixes depends on the object of a verb.

4 Tense and Aspect

According to Fijian Grammar by G.B. Milner (1972) Fijian has a past and a future tense. These tenses are realized with the use of *a* and *na* respectively. These tense markers always appear before the verb and in the case of *na* it will always appear immediately before the verb. The following provides an example for the past and future tenses as provided in Milner (1972).

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(10) a. Eratou a lako.
they PAST go
'They went.'

b. Eratou na lako.
they FUTURE go
'They will go'
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Meanwhile if *sa* is used with either tense, the meaning changes to included a connotation of having the action be completed and as an emphasizer. This is also described in Milner (1972) as an emphatic element in which the meaning of the verb is stressed and therefore this paper will use this categorization of *sa* as emphatic.

- (11) a. E a lako i vale.

 He PAST go to home

 'He went home (but we don't know whether he arrived).'
 - b. E a sa lako i vale.

 He PAST emphatic go to home

 'He went home (and arrived home).'
 - c. E na lako.

 He FUT go
 'He will go.'

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d. E sa na lako.
He emphatic FUT go 'He will be going.'
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The use of *sa* is generally used for the completion of an action or for emphasis. Meanwhile when neither *na* nor *a* appear in the phrase, it is not necessarily the present tense, but regarded as indefinite (Cammack, 1962). Therefore the sentence, *e lako* can be translated into the present tense 'he goes' but this may not only be the present tense.

An aspect in Fijian is the progressive aspect using the word *tiko*. *Tiko* is defined as to be, with the meaning of to be situated, to stay, or to reside in Milner (1972) and is used in situations where a verb is on-going or has been on-going. The example below is provided by elicitations made by speaker FIJ001.

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(12) a. Era lako tiko i rara.

They go -ing to park

'They are going to the park.'

b. Eratou a moce tiko.

They PAST sleep -ing

'They were sleeping.'
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The example above indicates that the action continues and stays within its state of doing and thus is a possible reason as to why the word *tiko* is used to expressive the progressive aspect.

While the tenses and progressive aspect are important to understand, there are many tenses and aspects that are yet to be explored.

5 Conclusion

This report has described three points on Fijian verb system.

First, Fijian is one of the languages that manifests ergative split. In the data set analysed, sentences with the same verb can change from an accusative to an ergative system and vice versa. In Fijian, there are transitive particles, and when this particles, generally suffixes, are added to a verb it is possible to have an object in the sentence. The are not a rule to determine what particle is related with a specific verb. In the sentence [e ndeta na wanga na ðaulaβau] 'the youth is pulling the boat', the suffix [ta] is added to the [ndte] 'pulling', and in this way it is possible to have the object [na wanga] 'boat'. This is an example of an accusative language, but in Fijian it is also possible

Second, unlike English and Japanese, Fijian verbs have different suffixes when they refer to different types of nouns. Verbs have a suffix "a" when the object is proper nouns or demonstrative pronouns, while they have a suffix "i" when the object is pronouns or general nouns.

Third, Fijian uses a past and a future tense. These tenses are realized with the use of *a* and *na* respectively. These tense markers always appear before the verb. Moreover, if *sa* is used with either tense, the meaning changes. Fijian also has the progressive aspect using the word *tiko*.

6 References

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