

## LEXICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENERATIONS IN FIJI<sup>1</sup>

A. J. Schütz

(University of Hawaii)

Among the better-documented areas of the Pacific, Fiji is unique in its complexity of dialect distribution and use. On the island of Viti Levu alone, dialects at the extreme ends are not mutually intelligible. Yet there seems to be no point between where the chain of intelligibility is broken.

Over a century ago, when the chiefs of Bau achieved political supremacy, the dialect of this small island off the eastern coast of Viti Levu was adopted as a lingua franca. Used first in church services, it was eventually adopted for political and educational purposes. Today, it is spoken and understood by almost all Fijians, regardless of the nature of their local village dialect.

In spite of the prestige of Bauan and the number of years it has been learned as a second dialect, it has not crowded out the local dialects. The remnants of old political affiliations and the constant use of the dialects for home and village affairs have ensured their continuance—at least for a time. But there has been a gradual levelling, probably unnoticed even by the speakers themselves. Such change is impossible to observe directly, but there is some evidence for its existence. As early as 1885, Gatschet doubted that some of his data could be considered authentic samples of local dialects. He guessed that "probably an excessive Bau element has crept into some of the specimens, owing to the circumstance that they were obtained from young men, whose speech approximates more to the Bau than that of the older men."<sup>2</sup> Other early reports indicate that the dialects of Rewa and Lau were sufficiently different from that of Bau to cause difficulties with Bible translations. In 1961, this investigator found that, except for a very few lexical differences and a minor phonemic one, these two dialects were very nearly like Bauan.

The changes of the past generation or two have had an even more significant effect on dialects in Fiji. The technological changes — radios, outboard motors, coastal bus service — and growing educational services have enlarged the younger Fijians' world many times. This increased communication with English- and Bauan-speaking people has had a noticeable effect on the younger speakers' local dialect. In a previous study, informants under twenty were used only when no one else was available. A word list elicited from one of these, a seventeen-year-old from an area usually quite divergent from Bauan, showed a much higher cognate percentage with the official dialect than those from older informants.

In January, 1963, word lists were obtained from five villages throughout Viti Levu, using a younger speaker and an older speaker from each village. The age range of the first group was from 18 to 29; that of the second from 56 to 75. The word list used was an adaptation of that used earlier by the writer: the Swadesh 200-word list, additional words used by Capell and Biggs in previous studies, and several dozen names for body parts that could be elicited without a translation medium. Those words that had previously proved difficult to translate were eliminated.

Because of the complexity of the comparisons, it is impossible to pick out one figure from each village that shows the degree to which younger speakers have been influenced by the standard dialect. Invariably, there were some responses from the older speakers that were more nearly like Bauan than those of the younger speakers. Thus, Column 6 in the Table gives the most significant figures. For a variety of reasons, the range of differences between the speakers is wide, with 0% at the lowest and 58.4% at the highest. Both extremes were unexpected. But the results give an indication of the trend toward the levelling of dialect differences and the speed at which it is taking place.

<sup>1</sup> This study was made possible by a grant from the Graduate School of the University of Hawaii. The data was collected on Viti Levu in January, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> Gatschet 1885: 194.

		Age	Items compared	Non-cognate between speakers	Non-identical between speakers	% of total more nearly like Bauan	% of non-identical items more nearly like Bauan	% of total identical to Bauan	% of total identical to Bauan, or with regular phonemic shifts, or different suffixation	% of total cognate with Bauan
Visesei	Older	75	333	22.5%	32.4%	2.1%	6.4%	20.1%	27.6%	46.2%
	Younger	18								
Nanukuloa	Older	58	337	12.7	19.5	5.0	25.3	45.7	64.7	74.1
	Younger	29								
Vitogo	Older	59	333	18.9	32.8	4.2	12.8	26.4	35.4	56.1
	Younger	18								
Korovou	Older	60	336	22.3	29.4	7.1	24.2	27.9	35.7	55.2
	Younger	20								
Korokula	Older	56	333	13.8	19.2	4.2	21.8	18.0	34.5	53.1
	Younger	21								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gatschet, A.S. 1885. "Specimens of Fijian Dialects". *Int. Z. allg. SprW.*, 193-208.

Schütz, Albert J. 1962. *A Dialect Survey of Viti Levu* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cornell University).