

Object licensing in Fijian and the role of adjacency

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1. An unusual DOM pattern in Fijian. Many researchers have noted that Fijian has an unusual differential object marking (DOM) pattern (e.g. Dixon 1988; Alderete 1998; Aranovich 2013). Pronoun and proper name objects must remain in a VP-internal position, adjacent to the verb, without the determiner *ko* that otherwise appears with pronouns/proper names (1a). In contrast, common nouns retain the determiner *na* and do not have to remain in the VP (1b).

- (1) a. e a [_{VP} kau-ti (***ko**) au mai] ko Eroni.
3SG PST bring-TR.PR DET.PR 1SG DIR DET.PR Eroni
'Eroni brought me.'
- b. e a [_{VP} kau-ta ___ mai] na ilokoloko ko Eroni.
3SG PST bring-TR.N DIR DET.N pillow DET.PR Eroni
'Eroni brought the pillow.'

The difference between the objects is also reflected in the transitive suffix on the verb (underlined), which is *-Ci* with pronouns and proper names, and *-Ca* with other objects. This pattern is surprising because it goes against crosslinguistic generalizations about DOM. DOM patterns obey an animacy or definiteness hierarchy (e.g. Aissen 2003), and objects higher on the scale are marked with additional case morphology (e.g. Keine and Müller 2008), and tend to appear in higher positions. In Fijian, however, it is the objects *higher* on the scale that must be in a *lower* position and show reduced morphological marking.

This talk argues that Fijian pronoun/proper name objects are licensed by morphological merger with the verb at PF (Levin 2015; Branam 2016). I provide novel evidence for the notion of licensing through adjacency by showing that the DOM pattern is sensitive only to surface adjacency, and can affect even nominals leftmost in an embedded CP. In this view, there is nothing special about Fijian DOM, except that it uses adjacency instead of a case marking strategy. These facts then provide evidence that nominals require licensing (Vergnaud 1981), and that DOM is about licensing (e.g. Danon 2006; Kalin 2016).

2. Pronoun/proper name objects are low. Fijian is a VOS/VSO language. Following Aranovich (2013), I diagnose the Fijian verb phrase with a set of postverbal particles that contribute meanings typically associated with low adverbials. These particles must precede subjects and take scope right-to-left (2).

- (2) e dau [_{VP} lagasere vinaka tuga] ko Mere.
3SG HAB sing well always DET.PR Mere
'Mary always sings well.'

I assume these particles right-adjoin to VP, yielding inverted scope. To account for V-initial order, I propose an operation of VP-fronting (*cf.* Sabel 2011). Now observe that pronoun/proper name objects necessarily precede postverbal particles (like *mai* in (3a–b)), and so remain VP-internal:

- (3) a. e a [_{VP} kau-ti au mai] ko Eroni.
3SG PST bring-TR 1SG DIR DET.PR Eroni
'Eroni brought me.'
- b. *e a [_{VP} kau-ti/ta ___ mai] au ko Eroni.
3SG PST bring-TR DIR 1SG DET.PR Eroni
'Eroni brought me.'

In contrast, common noun objects may appear after postverbal particles (1b) and thus higher in the clause.

3. Pronoun/proper name objects do not incorporate. The adjacency in (3a) does not reflect noun incorporation. Fijian does have productive noun incorporation: a common noun may be verb-adjacent without its determiner and, like pronouns/proper names, precede postverbal particles (4).

- (4) e dau kau ilokoloko tuga mai ko Eroni.
3SG HAB bring pillow always DIR DET.PR Eroni
'Eroni always brings pillows.'

However, noun incorporation requires the bare form of a transitive. Also, as Aranovich (2013) observes, incorporated nouns appear *inside* the verbal complex in ditransitives, before the transitive suffix:

- (5) au a va-kana-ika-taki Jone.
1SG PST CAUS-eat-fish-TR.PR Jone
'I fed John fish.'

Pronoun/proper name objects only follow the entire verb, and so do not undergo syntactic incorporation.

4. Partial polysynthesis. Alderete (1998) and Aranovich (2013) argue that this DOM pattern arises because Fijian is a *partial pronominal argument language*, in the sense of Jelinek (1984). In this view, pronouns/proper names are true objects, in the complement position of V (6), but common nouns are adjoined phrases, co-indexed with a pronoun incorporated into the verb (7).

- (6) [VP V Pronoun/proper name] ... (7) [VP V+*pro*_i] ... Common noun_i ...

This approach explains why pronouns/proper names are verb-adjacent: it reflects their base-generated position. Conversely, common nouns are adjuncts and so are not positionally restricted.

5. Adjacency across CP boundaries. I present new evidence against the view that Fijian is partial polysynthesis language, from derived environments in which pronouns/proper names can nonetheless be subject to adjacency. In particular, a pronoun or proper name can also end up adjacent to a verb if it is clefted inside an embedded CP, like the *wh*-pronoun *cei* in (8) (see Potsdam 2009 on Fijian clefts). In this configuration, the pronoun/proper name can optionally be treated as an object of the preceding higher verb: the *-Ci* suffix appears and the determiner *ko* is lost.

- (8) au kila-i [CP (***ko**) **cei** e a rai-ca na cava].
 1 SG know-TR.PR **DET.PR who** 3 SG PST see-TR.N DET.N what
 ‘I know who saw what.’

This ECM-like pattern does not involve movement, but is possible only if the pronoun/proper name and the higher verb are surface-adjacent. An adverb (9a), postverbal particle, or an overt subject in the higher clause all disrupt the effect. In addition, no object raising/scrambling is involved, as the pronoun/proper name cannot precede material from the higher clause (9b).

- (9) a. *au a gai kila-i nanao [CP **cei** e a rai-ca na cava].
 1 SG PST GAI know-TR.PR yesterday **who** 3 SG PST see-TR.N DET.N what
 ‘I found out yesterday who saw what.’
 b. *au a gai kila-i **cei** nanao [CP e a rai-ca na cava].
 1 SG PST GAI know-TR.PR **who** yesterday 3 SG PST see-TR.N DET.N what
 ‘I found out yesterday who saw what.’

The pronoun in the embedded CP can even be inside a disjoint structure. Omission of *ko* is possible only if the pronoun is the first disjunct, and so surface-adjacent to the higher verb:

- (10) au kila-i [CP [OrP **cei** se na cava] iko a rai-ca]
 1 SG know-TR.PR **who** or DET.N what 2 SG PAST see-TR.N
 ‘I know who or what you saw.’

The marking of pronoun/proper name objects in Fijian then cannot be due to base-generation (contra Alderete and Aranovich), since the adjacency requirement constrains even *derived* environments. (More evidence that adjacency is not incorporation is that noun incorporation is blocked in contexts like (8–10).)

6. Licensing through morphological merger. These facts provide novel evidence that adjacency can play a role in nominal licensing. I posit that Fijian lacks a strategy to assign accusative case (whether a dependent case, or assigned by *v*), so that pronoun/proper name objects are instead licensed through morphological merger with the verb at PF (Levin 2015; Branan 2016). Specifically, I propose that the determiner *ko* undergoes morphological merger with V+*v* (11), the result of which is spelled out as *-Ci*:

- (11) [vP V+v [DP **ko** Name/Pronoun]] → [vP V+v+**ko** [DP *kə* Name/Pronoun]]

M-merger exempts a DP from the Case Filter, because it is now part of the verb’s extended projection (Baker 1988; cf. Levin 2015). Prosodic and phonological evidence provide independent support for this operation: adjacent pronouns/proper names must be phrased with the verb (Scott 1948, Schütz 2014), and diphthongization is possible across the verb and pronoun/proper name boundary.

7. Common noun objects are caseless. I argue that common noun objects escape licensing because they are smaller and lack a D layer, together with its associated [uCase] feature (e.g. Danon 2006), so that they are caseless. Independent evidence that Fijian common nouns appear with less structure comes from the fact that they are number-neutral. In contrast, Fijian pronouns show *four* distinct numbers (singular, dual, paucal, plural). In addition to this, Fijian nouns do not combine directly with numerals or with quantifiers and are not marked for (in)definiteness (Dixon 1988; Aranovich 2013).