

TENDENCIES IN FIJI HINDI

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fiji Hindi is a koinê (see Siegel 1987:188) and thus does not technically belong in a discussion dealing with pidgins and creoles. Nevertheless its particular history makes it of special interest to this area of study, and it would be a pity if such an important language of the Pacific were not considered at this time.

Pidgin Fiji Hindi is a different entity to the Fiji Hindi being discussed here, although the two have certainly influenced each other. Standard Hindi is different again, being the form of Hindi used in Fiji on formal occasions (to the degree the speaker has any knowledge of it). I will not discuss these varieties of Hindi, nor the sociolinguistics or history of Hindi in Fiji since they have been excellently covered by Siegel (1987).

My intention here is to expand a little—perhaps even correct—what is known about the phonology and grammar of Fiji Hindi. The main sources on this are Moag (1977), Siegel (1977, 1987) and Hobbs (1985).

It is often alleged that Fiji Hindi is amazingly uniform throughout Fiji considering the different origins of its speakers. I tend to agree with this opinion, but this uniformity should not be exaggerated. There are a few significant differences in vocabulary and verb inflections. Some rural areas and the northern coast of Vanua Levu (the second largest island) stand out as being different from the rest of Fiji. These, however, are very general observations. A good dialect study is needed to pinpoint where differences exist and their extent. The bulk of my own study was done in Naleba (on Vanua Levu, 16km north-east of Labasa), Suva, and, for short periods, Raviravi, between Ba and Lautoka, on the western side of Viti Levu.

2. PHONOLOGY

My first reaction in studying the phonology of Fiji Hindi was one of disappointment. With people from so many different linguistic backgrounds thrown together, I had thought that Fiji Hindi might have developed some exotic phonology of its own. In this expectation I had overlooked the fact that most of the indentured labourers came from the north-east of India and spoke different varieties of Hindi. It is basically the phonology of these varieties that Fiji Hindi has inherited. The presence of speakers of other Indian languages did not override this,

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although they may have contributed to some of the changes which have taken place or are taking place.

The Standard Hindi consonants are listed below in the order of traditional Hindi grammars:

Stops:					
velar		<i>k</i>	<i>k^h</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>g^h</i>
palatal		<i>c</i>	<i>c^h</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>j^h</i>
retroflex		<i>ʈ</i>	<i>ʈ^h</i>	<i>ɖ</i>	<i>ɖ^h</i> (ɳ)
dental		<i>t</i>	<i>t^h</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>d^h</i> n
labial		<i>p</i>	<i>p^h</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b^h</i> m
Fricatives:	<i>h</i>	(<i>x</i>)	(<i>ʁ</i>)	(<i>f</i>)	
Sibilants:	<i>ʃ</i>	<i>s</i>	(<i>z</i>)		
Liquids:	<i>l</i>	<i>l^h</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>l</i>	
Semivowels:	<i>y</i>	<i>v</i>			
Extra stop:		(<i>q</i>)			

FIGURE 1: FIJI HINDI CONSONANT INVENTORY

The symbols in parentheses are what we might call secondary consonants—used only in careful speech, by learned speakers, or by speakers of Urdu. In Fiji Hindi, only the primary consonants are used, with the following exceptions:

- (a) The secondary consonant [f] has completely replaced the primary one [p^h]. This is not surprising, and has also occurred in some dialects in India, while other dialects have the two sounds in free variation. They are certainly not in free variation in Fiji, but [f] has in some cases given way to unaspirated [p]:

- (1)a. [həpta] ‘week’
 b. [fɔppa] ‘father’s sister’s husband’

Note that in the second example above, [f] has been retained initially, but has changed to [p] medially. For some speakers the change of [f] to [p] takes place optionally in many vocabulary items.

- (b) The secondary consonant [z] does occur occasionally, although it is usually replaced by [j]. It would probably have disappeared altogether if it were not for a few Urdu words and a few English borrowings. Even these latter are sometimes realized as [j], or occasionally [s].

- (2)a. [bɔjji] ‘busy’
 b. [jesi] ‘jersey, pullover’

- (c) The primary consonant [ʃ] has merged with [s] for many speakers, especially in rural areas. Loss of [ʃ] could well be complete if it were not for the influence of English.

- (3)a. [sadi] ‘wedding’
 b. [kɔsts] ‘try, effort’

Fiji Hindi has basically the same vowel system as Standard Hindi. The ten vowels can be divided into two sets of five, which are related to each other orthographically in the Devanagari script and phonetically:

First:	a	i	u	e	o
Second:	ə	ɪ	ʊ	æ	ɔ
				(əɪ)	(əʊ)

FIGURE 2: FIJI HINDI VOWEL INVENTORY

In India, the pronunciation of the last two vowels differs according to dialect, being either monophthongal ([æ] and [ɔ]) or diphthongal ([əɪ] and [əʊ]). It is the latter diphthongal pronunciation which is current in Fiji. The first three vowels of the second set ([ə], [ɪ] and [ʊ]) are termed short vowels and do not occur word-finally in Fiji Hindi. The diphthongs [əɪ] and [əʊ] also do not occur word-finally except in a few monosyllabic words. In fact, they are infrequent, constituting only about 1 per cent of total vowel occurrences.

Stress seems largely predictable in Fiji Hindi, although the rule is complex and the matter requires further research. Stress most often occurs on the penultimate syllable:

- (4)a. [pa'sina] 'sweat'
- b. ['gob^hi] 'cabbage'
- c. ['marts] 'he hit'

However, it occurs on the final syllable if it is a closed syllable with a long vowel:

- (5)a. [bɪs'was] 'belief'
- b. [məj'but] 'strong'

Stress also occurs on the final syllable (in disyllabic words), or on the antepenultimate syllable (in polysyllabic words) if the penultimate syllable is an open syllable with a short vowel and if the final syllable is also open:

- (6)a. [sə'fa] 'clean'
- b. ['kəɾɔwa] 'bitter'

Further study, hopefully, will clarify the issue of stress, and also the phonemic status of the short vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ] (vis-à-vis [i] and [u] respectively). If stress turns out to be phonemic, it is possible that these two short vowels are *not* phonemic, as their occurrence is very closely related to stress placement. Minimal pair candidates seem limited to final closed syllables, including monosyllables. Even in these cases, however, there may be a solution, at least from the point of view of an economic writing system: one could argue for writing the final consonant as doubled to indicate a final 'short' vowel. An alternative in that case to the transcription given in example (7) would be *pull* versus *pul*.

- (7)a. [pʊl] 'bridge'
- b. [pul] 'pool'

Fiji Hindi has, of course, been influenced by English. It has not taken over any sounds from English, but the high percentage of words borrowed does have its effect. English borrowings into Fiji Hindi are treated as in Standard Hindi except for the following :

- (a) English [ə] and [ɔ] are not realised as Hindi [ə] and [ɔ] (which are pronounced as diphthongs in Fiji Hindi) but as [e] and [o]. This is a little unfortunate (even though quite natural, of course), as it creates some homonyms while leaving [ə] and [ɔ] grossly under-utilised:

(8) [plen] 'plan' (or) 'plane'

One does sometimes hear [pleɪn] for the latter meaning.

- (b) English words ending in *-er* have that syllable realised as [-a] in Fiji Hindi, not (-ər). The few words with the latter pronunciation in Fiji Hindi are English words that have come via India.

(9) [bətʃa] 'butter' but [moʃər] '(motor-)car'

English alveolar stops are realised as Fiji Hindi retroflex stops. In Standard Hindi there are considerably fewer words in the vocabulary employing the retroflex series than there are the dental. The high incidence of English borrowings in Fiji Hindi changes the situation and puts the two on a more even footing—giving Fiji Hindi a distinctive sound in the process, perhaps.

Interestingly, the Fijian phonemic system has a set of dental stops, not alveolar like English. Fiji Hindi faithfully borrows Fijian words with its dental series:

(10a) [ɖakua] 'dakwa, kauri type'

b. [ʈanoa] 'tanoa, yaqona bowl'

Occasionally, a Fijian word is heard with a retroflex stop. While hard to prove, it seems plausible that such a word may have come in through English:

(11) [ɖuruka], [ɖəruka] or [ɖuruka] 'duruka, cane type'

Both Fijian and English [ɖ] are borrowed as dental [ɖ]. English [θ] is borrowed as Hindi [tʰ] in the following example, and perhaps elsewhere:

(12) [tʰausən] 'thousand'

It is interesting that, although linguists often illustrate in their phonetics classes the difference between aspirated and non-aspirated stops from English (e.g. [tʰɒp] versus [st=ɒp]) and although this difference is phonemic in Hindi, neither Standard Hindi nor Fiji Hindi speakers hear English initial stops as aspirated. They are always borrowed as non-aspirated stops.

While the phonology of Fiji Hindi does not deviate sharply from Standard Hindi, there are nevertheless some interesting tendencies. Some have been mentioned already, and others have been well covered by Moag (1977:281–285). In addition, note the following:

- (a) Most content words beginning with [v] have an alternative pronunciation with [b], which is preferred:

(13) [vɪcar] or [bɪcar] 'opinion'

- (b) A dental articulation is sometimes replaced in the lexicon by a retroflex one. It is difficult to see why; the change seems unpredictable:

(14) [pəpɪʈa] 'pawpaw' (< [pəpita])

(15) [bəkʈi] 'female goat' (< [bəkri])

3. GRAMMAR

Standard Hindi nouns are declined for number, gender and case. Adjectives and verbs in large part agree in number and gender with the nouns they modify. Much of this complex morphology has been simplified in Fiji Hindi and some has disappeared.

Whereas in Standard Hindi all nouns are treated grammatically as masculine or feminine, in Fiji Hindi gender distinction has been all but abolished. Human or animal females *may* take special feminine agreement, but even that is purely optional. If Standard Hindi were to lose its influence, one could predict, I think, that the feminine forms would disappear altogether. In the following example, the optional feminine form would be (əcc^hi).

- (16) *I əcc^ha lərki hæ.*
 this good girl is
 She is a good girl.

Number has also been much modified. There is a special plural marker [log] or [logən] which is used to indicate plurality with words referring to humans and sometimes other animates. Otherwise plurality is left unmarked, or is expressed by quantifiers.¹

- (17) *ɔrət log awe hæ.*
 woman plural come.PRES is
 The women are coming.

Case has also disappeared. Nouns retain the same form whatever their function in the sentence. Their particular relationship to the action or event is conveyed chiefly by postpositions. However, a rather peculiar development has taken place. In Standard Hindi a masculine noun like, say, [rasta] 'road' would change to [raste] (the 'oblique' case, as it is called) before a postposition. In Fiji Hindi, the noun does not change in this way, but all the postpositions have alternative forms which happen to end in [-e]. Has some sort of case function ('oblique') invaded these postpositions?

TABLE 1: POSTPOSITION CHANGES

Standard Hindi	Fiji Hindi	
<i>ka, ki, ke</i>	<i>ke</i>	of the road
<i>ko</i>	<i>ke</i>	to the road
<i>raste mē</i>	<i>rasta mē</i>	in the road
<i>pər</i>	<i>pe</i>	on the road
<i>se</i>	<i>se</i>	from the road
<i>tək</i>	<i>le</i>	until the road

One does not feel that the final [-e] occurring as it can on practically all the Fiji Hindi postpositions can be terribly important. Apparently, native speakers feel the same way, for after a noun ending in a vowel (and occasionally even after one ending in a consonant), the -e may be dropped (except in the case of [le]). This would leave [rasta m], for example, which may in fact become [rastəm]. The wheel has gone full circle, and another case system seems to be developing.

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows:

EXP	expectational	INF	infinitive
HAB	habitual	PART	participle
IMP	imperative	PRES	present

I will now briefly look at verbs by considering a verb paradigm and then commenting on just a few parts of it. The forms on the left of the paradigm are the more common forms for Fiji Hindi, those on the right, labelled 'North', are substituted for the usual forms on the northern coast of Vanua Levu and probably also in some rural areas elsewhere. The numbers 1, 2, 3 are entered where forms differ for first, second and third person. Forms in square brackets are optional plurals. The verb [hæ] 'is', put in parentheses for the present tense, may be omitted. Alternative forms are separated by commas.

TABLE 2: PARADIGM OF VERB ENDINGS

		Usual	North
Independent Infinitive		-o	
Dependent Infinitive		-e	
Permissive Infinitive		-ən, -ɪn	
Future Imperative		-na	
Present Imperative		-o	
Subjunctive	1	-i	
	2	-o	
	3	-e	
Conditional		-ta	-ta, ət, -te
Present Participle		-ət, te	
Passive Participle		-an	
Future	1	-ega	-ab, ɪb
	2	-ega	-ɪyo
	3	-i	-i (-iē)
Present	1	-ta (hæ)	-ɪt (hæ), -e (hæ)
	2	-ta (hæ)	-e (hæ)
	3	-e (hæ)	-e (hæ)
(Extra Present)			-ət hæ
Past Continuous		-ət rəha, -ta rəha	-ət rəha
Past Simple	1	-a	
	2	-a	
	(transitive) 3	-ɪs, [-ɪn]	
	(intransitive) 3	-a, -ɪ, [-ɪn]	
Past Habitual	1	-i	
	2	-a	
	3	-i	
Expectational		-bə kəro	

3.1 INFINITIVES

The [-o] infinitive form in Fiji Hindi, probably derived from the imperative form of Pidgin Hindi, as Siegel (1987:197) indicates, has become the stand-alone infinitive and dictionary entry for words in Fiji Hindi, replacing the Standard Hindi infinitive in [-na] for these

functions. The [-e] infinitive is termed dependent because it may occur only before a postposition or in construction with another verb (18). The [-ən] infinitive occurs, it would seem, only with the verb [deo] ‘give’, to indicate permission (19). Moag (1977:267) declares it is an option to the [-e] infinitive in this usage, but it seems to have taken over entirely for some speakers, at least in the north.

- (18) *Həm i kam kare nāi sakt.*
 I this work do.INF not can.PRES
 I can't do this work.
- (19) *Piən do.*
 drink.INF give.IMP
 Let him drink.

3.2 IMPERATIVES

It has been common to refer to the [-na] imperative as a ‘polite’ imperative. This is true, but I believe that its primary function is as a future imperative. Its politeness derives from the fact that to ask someone to do something in the future is less forceful than to ask them to do it now. Sometimes it is used more like a subordinate verb than a genuine imperative. Thus in the context of (20) below, the person was *not* being instructed to go to town by the first imperative; the first clause is more like a temporal clause, the second being a true imperative:

- (20) *Taun jana təb lana.*
 town go.IMP then bring.IMP
 Bring it when you go to town.

3.3 PARTICIPLES

A use of the present participle in [-te] that is, I think, undocumented so far, is its occurrence with the negative, to give a rather elliptical negative present indicative (21); it provides a good example of how a new tense could develop. The passive participle ending [-an] is a form not found in Standard Hindi; it is sometimes used almost impersonally (22).

- (21) *Ca pite nāi.*
 tea drink.PART not
 I don't drink tea.
- (22) *Kuc^h nāi dek^{han} hāme.*
 something (is).not seen.PART to.me
 I didn't see anything.

3.4 FUTURE

Siegel (1987:206–207) goes into much detail about the origin of the future tense forms of Fiji Hindi. He seems to imply there are no *-əb* or *-tb* first person future forms in Fiji, even though Moag (1977:219) mentions the latter. The forms do exist, however, at least in the north. These northern first person forms are, nevertheless, much more restricted in use (considered very ‘rustic’) than are the second and third person forms (including the plural—see §3.7), which are heard quite frequently.

3.5 PRESENT

The distinction of Standard Hindi between the simple present and the present continuous has been lost in Fiji Hindi. The extra set of present forms in the north, however, suggests that a separate present continuous tense could reconstitute itself. The inclusion or omission of the optional [hæ] could also take on meaning, but as far as I can tell, that has not yet happened.

3.6 PAST CONTINUOUS

This tense also does service as the past habitual (but see §3.8). The distinction between the two was lost in Fiji Hindi as just reported above for the present tense. The actual form used for the past continuous is reported by Moag as always being [-ət reha]. In the Suva area at least, the [-ta reha] form is the normal one for many speakers. This may reflect the influence of Standard Hindi on Fiji Hindi in the city. However, it makes sense to use the same participial form for the present and past continuous tenses, so Standard Hindi may not be entirely to blame.

3.7 PAST SIMPLE

The main point to note about this tense is that Moag, Siegel and Hobbs all treat its plural form as if it were *compulsory*. It is not. What's more, in some areas it is not commonly encountered and in fact occurs less than the optional future plural (see §3.4). Is this a change in usage, or was the original observation erroneous, which was then repeated by successive linguists? The latter seems unlikely, but ten years or so is a very short time for such a change to take hold. It can be noted, by the way, that the third person form for intransitive verbs is quite commonly [-is]. Whether this frequency represents an increase of its use, and thus a gradual shift towards regularisation, is difficult to say.

3.8 PAST HABITUAL

It was said above that the past continuous did service also for the past habitual (see Moag 1977:208, 221), and indeed the tense can be used in both senses. However, there is another set of forms, not recorded in the literature (to my knowledge), that has this specific function. What may have led to overlooking them is that the identical verb endings show up elsewhere in the verb paradigm, with different meanings. This is particularly problematic for the second person form, for it is identical with the simple past. I have had informants turn first or third person examples into second person, however, and they have regularly provided the [-a] form (rather than, say, the past continuous form). I conclude that it should be regarded as the third member of the set. The first and third person forms are the same as the subjunctive and future forms respectively, and thus have a future orientation that reminds one of the English habitual using 'would' (as in an alternative translation for example (23) 'We would work till two in the morning').

- (23) *Həm log dui baje rat le kam kəri.*
 I plural two o'clock night till work do.HAB
 We used to work until two in the morning.

- (24) *Səb roj həmar g^həre k^hana k^hai.*
 every day my home food eat.HAB
 He used to eat at my home every day.

3.9 EXPECTATIONAL

This unusual mood, which employs the suffix [-be] and the verb [kəro] 'do', is a formation not occurring in Standard Hindi. Moag (1977:211) presents it in a confusing and, it seems to me, mistaken way. Contrary to what he says, it can occur in a number of different tenses, not just one. A restriction I have observed, however, is that it seems to occur only in the negative.

- (25) *Bolbe nəi kəro.*
 speak.EXP not do.IMP
 Don't answer him.

(The context here is a mother advising her daughter who is being teased by her brother; the advice is not to retort 'as he expects'.)

- (26) *Abe nəi kərts.*
 come.EXP not do.PAST
 He did not come although (OR as) expected.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have looked selectively at a few grammatical features which seem of particular interest. Although Fiji Hindi has 'simplified' Hindi grammar, these changes have mainly involved simplification of the form of expression and the elimination of certain suppletive morphemes or constructions. There has been very little loss of semantic precision or flexibility, and indeed, as in §3.9, some convenient new turns of phrase have come into being. The most noticeable changes seem to be the disappearance of the distinction between the present simple and continuous forms and between the past habitual and continuous forms, and the collapse of the distinction between 'of' and 'to' for the Fiji Hindi postpositions (both being realised by [ke], see Table 3). There seems to be no trend to re-establish this latter contrast, but for the tense forms, the past habitual, as we saw in §3.8, has been reconstituted (perhaps recently) as a distinct tense, and it is possible that a similar reconstitution of a present tense could take place, or even *is* taking place (see §3.5).

The rate of change in Fiji Hindi appears to be quite fast. It is regrettable that more systematic study of Fiji Hindi did not begin at an earlier date; we might then have clearer evidence for certain changes and how they occur. Even so, from what we know already, it will be interesting to observe how current tendencies and other developments further evolve.

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