**ONOMATOPOEIAS IN FAKAMAE**

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**Introduction**

Fakamae is a Polynesian Outlier language spoken on Emae Island, Vanuatu.[[1]](#footnote-1) The language is one of 15 Polynesian Outliers situated throughout Melanesia and Micronesia. Polynesian Outliers exist as a result of back-migrations made by Polynesian speakers. These people left eastern Polynesia sometime in the last thousand years and travelled west to non-Polynesian areas (Clark, 1994, p. 109; Scaglion & Feinberg, 2012, p. 8). Fakamae belongs to the Austronesian family and the Oceanic genus. It is an agglutinative language. It is spoken by approximately 200 people on Emae Island and by roughly the same number in other places. It is likely that a language shift is in progress (Dewar, forthcoming).

**Position of onomatopoeia in the language system**

There are only seven onomatopoeias identified in Fakamae. There is no label in the language for such words that imitate sounds of the environment. These words constitute a minor word class on syntactic grounds, as they occur as the predicate of a dedicated non-verbal clause type. Onomatopoeias in Fakamae are under-described and are not covered by descriptive grammars. No published dictionaries of Fakamae exist. Onomatopoeias are identified as such via interlinear glosses where they occur within the Fakamae corpus, however there are no corpus entries devoted specifically to onomatopoeia (Dewar, 2020). Onomatopoeias do not appear to be an open class as there is no evidence of productivity in this regard. Further targeted data collection is required to determine the presence and extent of other sound symbolic phenomena in Fakamae such as ideophones, phonosthemes, and phonetic iconicity. It is unclear whether Fakamae employs borrowed onomatopoeias. Several of the onomatopoeias identified in the language also occur within neighbouring languages, and it is unclear from whence they originated.

**Description of onomatopoeia**

In the following subsections, onomatopoeias in Fakamae are described in relation to the language’s phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

*Phonology*

In the following subsections, onomatopoeias in Fakamae are discussed in relation to the language’s vowel and consonant inventory, syllable structures, and stress system. Fakamae is not a tonal language, and thus there is no discussion in this regard.

*Vowel and consonant inventory*

There are 14 consonants and 10 vowels in Fakamae. Consonants are presented in Table 1, and vowels are presented in Table 2. Of the 10 vowels, five are short and five are equivalent long vowels. Long vowels occur with less frequency than short vowels. The front-back parameter appears to have become neutralised in relation to rounded vowels (Dewar & Palmer, 2021). Velar plosives are prenasalised.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Place and manner | Bilabial | Labio-dental | Dental | Alveolar | Velar |
| Voiceless plosive | p |  | t̪ <t> |  | k |
| Voiced plosive | b |  | d̪ <d> |  | ɡ <q> |
| Nasal | m |  | n̪ <n> |  | ŋ <ɡ> |
| Voiceless fricative |  | f |  | s |  |
| Voiced fricative |  | v |  |  |  |
| Trill |  |  |  | r |  |
| Lateral Approximant |  |  |  | l |  |

Table 1 Fakamae consonant phonemes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Place and manner | Front | | Central | | Back |
| Close | i | i: <ii> |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | ø <u> | ø: <uu> |  |
| Close-mid | e | e: <ee> |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | œ <o> | œ: <oo> |  |
| Open-mid |  |  |  |  |  |
| Open |  |  | ɐ <a> | ɐ: <aa> |  |

Table 2 Fakamae vowel phonemes

Five onomatopoeias include long vowels: *qoo* ‘cry of a dog barking,’ *moo* ‘cry of a cow,’ *mee* ‘cry of a goat,’ *kotkotaa* ‘cry of a hen laying an egg,’ and *qaraaraa* ‘sound of bamboo cracking.’ One onomatopoeia employs a consonant that does not otherwise occur in the Fakamae phoneme inventory. The sound [ʃ] occurs in *ksh* ‘cry of a silver-eared honey eater.’ The Fakamae orthography does not include a symbol for [ʃ], and thus the digraph <sh> is used following native speaker convention and English orthography. (English is a primary language of education on Emae Island, alongside French and the national language of Vanuatu, Bislama.) Consonant clusters are also unacceptable in Fakamae barring processes of vowel syncope, glide formation, reduplication, borrowing, and V1 shortening within a serial verb construction. Note that *kotkotaa* ‘cry of a hen laying an egg’ includes a heterosyllabic consonant cluster. It is unclear whether this is the result of any of the above-mentioned processes by which consonant clusters acceptably occur. Earlier documentation includes the corresponding entry *kotakota*, the orthography of which suggests no long final vowel and no consonant cluster (Clark, 2009). An absence of audio recordings in relation to this previously documented entry makes it difficult to draw conclusions regarding the phonological changes undergone by this onomatopoeia over time.

*Syllabic structure*

Fakamae is a mora based language. The common syllable structures are V, VV, CV, and CVV. There are additional syllable structures which involve phonetic consonant clusters and word final codas. These are CCV, CCVV, CVC, and CVVC. These syllable structures can occur as a result of vowel syncope, glide formation, reduplication, borrowing, and V1 shortening within a serial verb construction (Dewar, forthcoming). The most common syllable structure in Fakamae onomatopoeias is CVV. The onomatopoeia *r* ‘cry of a fruit dove’ is a single syllable word consisting of only a trill. *Ksh* ‘cry of a silver-eared honey eater’ is also a single syllable word containing only consonants. The syllable structure of both of these words is otherwise unacceptable in Fakamae as the nucleus of a syllable must ordinarily be occupied by a vowel.

*Stress*

Fakamae has a fixed stress pattern of right-aligned moraic trochees. It is a head foot left system: in words of more than one foot, primary stress falls within the left foot. However, Fakamae also follows a ‘weight to stress’ rule (Prince, 1990). Under this rule, the language’s regular stress pattern is overridden when a single syllable foot occurs within a word of more than one foot. In these cases, primary stress falls within the single syllable foot regardless of its position in relation to other feet within the word. Onomatopoeias follow the stress rules of Fakamae. All of the onomatopoeias which contain vowels consist of at least one long vowel, meaning that stress occurs within that single syllable foot regardless of whether or not it is the leftmost foot within the word. For example, *kotkotaa* ‘cry of a hen laying an egg’ has a stress pattern in which the rightmost foot carries primary stress because it is a single syllable foot: /ˌkœt̪.kœ.ˈt̪ɐː/. The onomatopoeia *qaraaraa* ‘sound of bamboo cracking’ includes two single syllable feet. In this case the head foot left rule is observed, with the left-most single syllable foot carrying the primary stress: /ɡɐ.ˈrɐː.ˌrɐː/.

*Tone*

Fakamae is not a tonal language.

*Morphology and syntax*

In the following subsections, onomatopoeias in Fakamae are discussed in relation to word-formation, word classes, and syntax.

*Word-formation*

The most productive means of word formation in Fakamae is via derivational affixation. Onomatopoeias are not formed via any process of word formation in this language. Three secondary onomatopoeias are derived from primary onomatopoeias via conversion. The verb *kotakotaa* ‘(hen) lay (an egg)’ is derived from the primary onomatopoeia *kotkotaa* ‘cry of a hen laying an egg.’ The verb *qaraaraa* ‘(bamboo) crack’ is derived from the primary onomatopoeia *qaraaraa* ‘sound of bamboo cracking,’ as is the verb *qoo* ‘(dog) bark’ from *qoo* ‘cry of a dog barking.’ Example (1) illustrates *kotkotaa* as an onomatopoeia and (2) illustrates *kotkotaa* as a verb.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (1) | *Re moa ta kotkotaa.* | | | | |
|  | re | moa | ta | kotkotaa |  |
|  | sg | hen | sub | o |  |

‘The hen went “kotkotaa.”’

(Jack Matariki, 2022)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (2) | *Re moa tagi e kotkotaa.* | | | | | | |
|  | re | moa | tagi | e | kotkotaa |  |  |
|  | sg | hen | cry | real | hen.lay.egg |  |  |

‘The crying hen lay (an egg).’

(Jack Matariki, 2022)

Verbal reduplication is common in Fakamae and is used to mark verbal number or the iterative or durative nature of an event. Reduplication can also be used to derive an intransitive verb from a bound verb root. It also occasionally marks plural number on nouns. Reduplicants are usually prefixed to the root and are less frequently suffixed to the root. The two onomatopoeias that contain more than one foot may include frozen historical partial reduplication. The form of *kotkotaa* ‘cry of a hen laying an egg’ suggests a possible CVC reduplicant prefix, and the form of *qaraaraa* ‘sound of bamboo cracking’ suggests a possible CVV reduplicant suffix. These words have no unreduplicated equivalents, and for this reason they are analysed as synchronically monomorphemic roots.

*Word classes*

Onomatopoeias comprise a distinct minor word class based on the syntactic criteria described below. They do not take inflectional markers.

*Syntax*

In a sentence, onomatopoeias occur within a dedicated non-verbal clause type. The predicate of this clause is the onomatopoeia, which is preceded by the word *ta*. *Ta* elsewhere occurs as a complementiser, as a relativiser, and before an embedded clause of direct speech. The noun phrase subject of this clause typerefers to the entity that makes the sound described by the onomatopoeia. Example (3) illustrates this is relation to *qaraaraa* ‘sound of bamboo cracking’ as does example (1) above in relation to *kotkotaa* ‘cry of a hen laying an egg.’

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (3) | *Re lopu fati ta qaraaraa.* | | | | |
|  | [re | lopu | fati]s | [ta | qaraaraa]pred |
|  | sg | bamboo | break | sub | o |

‘The cracking bamboo went “qaraaraa.”’

(Jack Matariki, 2022)

*Semantics*

*Overview*

Onomatopoeias are all from natural sources in Fakamae. They are primarily animal sounds; three are bird sounds, and three are mammal sounds. Only one onomatopoeia is not an animal sound: *qaraaraa* ‘sound of bamboo cracking’ is an earth based vegetation sound. It appears that all other sound types have no representation via primary onomatopoeia, and at this stage it is unclear whether missing sound type meanings have alternate means of expression in Fakamae. There are verbs and nouns which are suggestive of onomatopoeia, however for the most part there are no equivalent primary onomatopoeias.

*Semantic relations*

Further targeted data collection is required to determine the extent to which synonymy, antonymy, and polysemy of words occur in Fakamae. Of the small number of onomatopoeias identified in the language, no semantic relations are observable. As discussed earlier, there are three primary onomatopoeias from which secondary onomatopoeias are derived: *kotkotaa* ‘cry of a hen laying an egg,’ *qoo* ‘cry of a dog barking,’ and *qaraaraa* ‘sound of bamboo cracking.’ A semantic change is observed in each of these cases whereby the sound becomes an action.

**Conclusion**

Very few onomatopoeias are identified in Fakamae. These are classified as a minor word class on syntactic grounds, as these words occur as the predicate of a dedicated non-verbal clause type. Onomatopoeias adhere to suprasegmental rules in Fakamae. They largely adhere to phonotactic rules, however two onomatopoeias violate these rules in terms of non-vowel nuclei. They also largely adhere to Fakamae’s phoneme inventory, with one exception. All onomatopoeias in Fakamae are natural sounds, and all but one are animal sounds. Three onomatopoeias have secondary onomatopoeia derivations which are verbs. It is unclear at this stage why there appear to be so few onomatopoeias in Fakamae and whether different linguistic means are used in their absence. Further targeted data collection is required in order to answer these questions.

**List of abbreviations**

o onomatopoeia

pred predicate

real realis

s subject

sg singular

sub subordinator

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**Appendix**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **onomatopoeia** | **meaning** | **English translation** |
| 1 | *qaraaraa* | *re tagi re lopu e na mafaafaa* | ‘sound/cry of bamboo cracking’ |
| 2 | *qoo* | *re tagi/reo re kuri e na qoo* | ‘cry/voice of a dog barking’ |
| 3 | *moo* | *re tagi/reo re puluki* | ‘cry/voice of a cow’ |
| 4 | *mee* | *re tagi/reo re naani* | ‘cry/voice of a goat’ |
| 5 | *kotkotaa* | *re tagi/reo re moa e na tifoa na fua* | ‘cry/voice of a hen laying an egg’ |
| 6 | *ksh* | *re tagi/reo re tagtagiaso* | ‘cry/voice of a silver-eared honey eater’ |
| 7 | *r* | *re tagi/reo re rupe* | ‘cry/voice of a fruit dove’ |

1. Fakamae is also referred to as Mae, Emae, and Fakamakata in literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)