

Fijian Verbs of Cooking

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Introduction

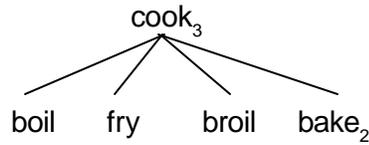
The study of language is not limited to the study of its grammatical, syntactic and phonological systems. It also includes the study of its pragmatic and semantic systems. This paper is a study of a small section of the network of meanings for the Fijian lexeme *saqa*. This lexeme has several meanings. According to Capell (1991:182), one meaning is 'to run into, collide, as one canoe with another'. Another meaning is 'to cook or boil', and a third is 'a species of fish, trevally'. It is the second meaning that is the subject of this study. This article will attempt to discuss similarities and differences between English and Fijian in this lexical field of cooking. Included in the Fijian network are lexemes borrowed from other languages, particularly English, as new methods of cooking are adopted by Fijians. The study also reveals that there are many Fijian lexemes in this semantic field that have no equivalent in English. Finally, a semantic analysis will be made on the structure of Fijian verbs of cooking.

Cooking terms categorised

In English, the verb *cook* has several senses. The basic, most inclusive sense has been called *cook*₃ by Lehrer (1969) and refers to an object (food) being transformed by an application of heat to an irreversible condition.¹ The Fijian verbs are categorised following Lehrer's (1969:41) groupings for *cook*₃:

The lexical field covered by *cook*₃ can be divided into four main categories headed by the lexemes *boil*, *fry*, *broil* and *bake*₂ ... The terms ... are largely incompatible with each other. These four lexemes ... are hyponyms of *cook*₃.

¹ Throughout this article, subscript numbers indicate particular senses of words.

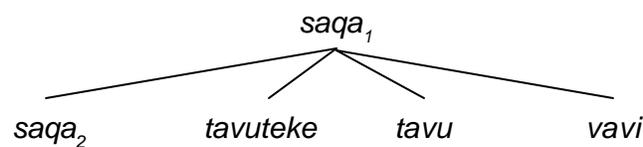


In Fijian, the lexeme *saqa* has two senses. *Saqa*₁ has a general sense of *cook*, while *saqa*₂ has a general sense of *boil*. Thus if someone says:

Saqa na ika
Cook art. fish
(Cook the fish)

the speaker is making a request for a fish that both the speaker and the addressee know about to be cooked, using the sense of *saqa*₁. The utterance presupposes that there is a raw fish that needs to be prepared and cooked, but gives no indication of how it is to be cooked. If the speaker is asked and replies: *Me saqa*, then the fish is to be boiled in the sense of *saqa*₂. Similarly, if someone says *Saqara na yaloka*, it is the second sense, *saqa*₂ which is understood, 'boil the egg' and, since boiling is also the most usual way of cooking cassava, taro, kumara and rice, *saqa*₂ is used.

Thus we have the superordinate *saqa*₁, with the hyponyms *saqa*₂ (boil), *tavuteke* (fry), *tavu* (broil) and *vavi* (bake₂).

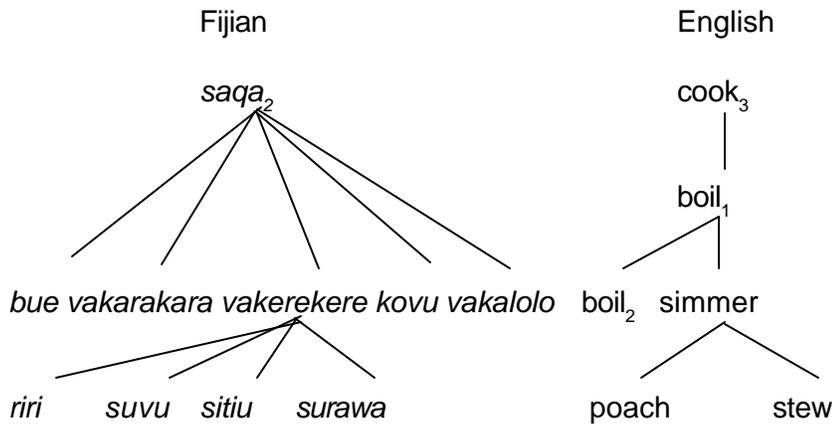


In Fijian, the verbs of cooking relate to the method and the type of food being cooked.

1. Boiling

Hyponyms of *saga*₂

The tree diagram below and the explanations which follow illustrate the similarities and differences between English and Fijian with regard to boiling as a hyponym of *cook*₃. *Boil*₁ is the general sense of boiling, while *boil*₂ has the sense of vigorous boiling (Lehrer 1969:41).



Hyponyms of *saga*₂.

Bue is vigorous boiling and is used for all types of food in all types of liquid, water, oil, lolo, sauce etc.

Vakarakara is a lexeme used only for boiling green leafy vegetables. It encompasses all processes of boiling. Therefore, if anyone says:

Sa vakarakara na kaveti
 asp. boiled art. cabbage
 (The cabbage is boiled.)

one can be sure that the vegetable is boiled, and not cooked in any other way.

Vakerekere (derived from *kere*) is synonymous with the English lexeme *simmer*, cooking 'just below boiling point without the rolling bubbles which

characterize boil₂' (Lehrer 1969:41). This method of cooking is applicable to both liquids and solids immersed in liquid. It is a lexeme used only for cooking with some form of liquid.

Kovu is the Fijian term for wet cookery which, according to Rietz (1961:377), is cooking in water, or where water is a medium of heat exchange. Food items, especially, seafood like turtle meat and octopus, are cooked in this way. The important point is that the food is wrapped in banana leaves. It is then placed on a shallow pan in a big pot of boiling water.

Vakalolo, boiling in coconut milk. Food can be boiled, simmered or poached in it. Food items cooked in this way include vegetables and protein foods other than eggs and meat. Fruits such as ripe bananas can also be cooked in coconut milk. Rice is the only carbohydrate that is cooked in coconut milk.

Hyponyms of *vakerekere*

Riri is synonymous with the English lexeme *poach*, simmering food with the intention of retaining its shape. In the Fijian context, this method of cooking is usually used for ripe plantains or fish. The liquid used can be water or coconut milk.

Suvu is borrowed from the English soup. It refers to "a long, slow method of cooking in a liquid which is kept at simmering point" (Lehrer 1969:42) and refers to cooking protein foods other than fish, seafood and eggs. Such protein foods are mixed with vegetables and simmered in water. If thickening (eg cornflour) is added, it is referred to as *sitiu* (borrowed from English *stew*).

Suruwa, simmering fish, seafood, especially crustaceans, in a lot of non-fat or fat liquid with curry spices added. The word comes from Hindi, and means *adding water*.

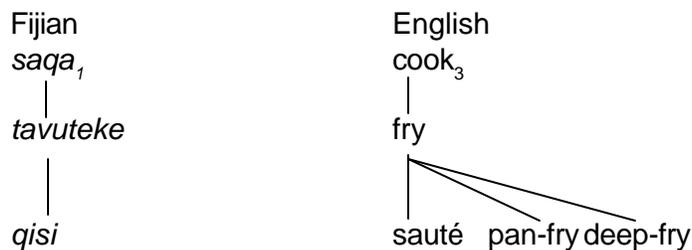
2. Frying

The Fijian term for frying is *tavuteke*, *tavu* meaning to broil, or roast, or toast on embers and *teke* referring to a potsherd or clamshell placed under a pot to support it. The noun *i tavuteke* is a frying pan. Anything that is cooked in fat in some sort of pan is *tavuteke*. There is no distinction between deep-frying or sautéing in Fijian. Most kinds of food can be fried.

Hyponym of *tavuteke*

There is only one hyponym of *tavuteke* in Fijian, *qisi*, which is synonymous with English *brown*. *Qisi* refers to frying in a little fat in a pan or pot. It is used to describe the browning of onions, meat and raw, leafy vegetables. A pot, rather than a frying pan, is generally used. (For browning food in an oven, *vavi* is used).

Contrast with English *fry*



Notice that, in Fijian, *qisi* is a hyponym of *tavuteke*, and *saqa*₁ is the superordinate whereas, in English, *brown* cannot be placed in a hierarchical relationship in the *fry – broil – boil – bake* set although it is related to it (Lehrer 1969:45).

3. Broiling

In English, broiling is a method of cooking solid foods using direct heat, usually below the food. *Tavu* is Fijian for *broil*, and it also means

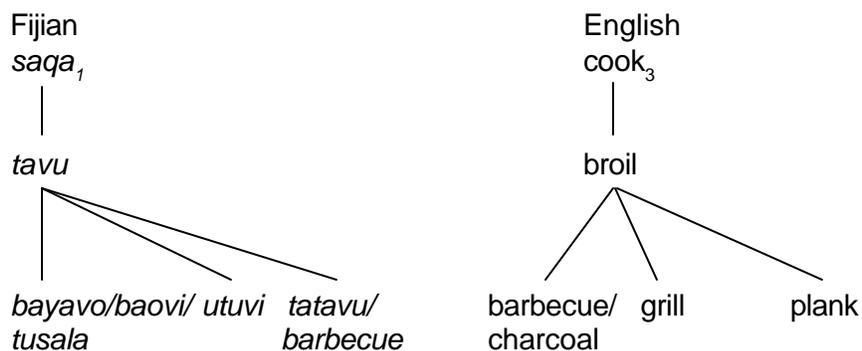
to toast. *Tavu*, according to Capell (1991:226) is to broil, roast on embers, to heat at the fire.

Hyponyms of *tavu*

Bayavo, *baovi* and *tusala* all refer to broiling something soft such as fish or shellfish wrapped in banana leaves.

Utuvi is broiling in bamboo. Food, especially seafood, is packed in the hollow of a length of bamboo and then broiled over burning charcoal.

Tatavu refers to broiling fish or rootcrops directly over a fire. It is also used for planking which, according to Dunn (1974:21), is baking whole fish steaks on an oiled hard board or plank. Fijian has added *barbecue* to *tatavu*'s lexical field.



These diagrams are not entirely equivalent. There is no direct translation for *bayavo*, *baovi*, *tusala* and *utuvi* in English. Only *tatavu* corresponds to English and covers *barbecue*, *grill* and *plank*.

4. Bake

To bake is to cook in an oven using dry heat. *Roast* has a range of meanings which overlap with *bake* and *broil*, making *roast* a partial hyponym of *bake* (Lehrer 1969:45).

Vavi corresponds to both *bake* and *roast*, as it is used for all types of food, pastry and bread as well as meat and rootcrops etc., and can be done both in an earth oven or in a gas/electric oven. It also includes the process of browning in an oven.

Semantic Analysis

According to Hazlewood (1979:15), most Fijian verbs appear to be underived words. However, some verbs are derived e.g. from adjectives and nouns,

The basic word

Saqa is an underived word. It can be used as an adjective and as a verb.

Na ika saqa
art. fish cooked
(The cooked fish)

Saqa-ra or *saqa* are the transitive verb forms, used here in an imperative sentence.

Saqa na ika
Cook art. fish
(Cook the fish)

Prefixes and suffixes

Some Fijian verbs of cooking have the prefix *vaka-*, or its short form *va-*, giving the meaning 'cause to become cooked'. Most adjectives become verbs by prefixing *vaka-* and suffixing *-taka*. (An analogy in English would be *em-bold-en*.) An example from the lexical field of *saqa* is *vakarakarataka*. *Rakara* means complaining loudly. Boiling taro leaves or slippery cabbage makes a lot of noise.

vaka – rakara – taka
prefix adjective verb suffix
(to boil green leafy vegetables)

Similarly, when the noun *lolo* (coconut milk) is prefixed with *vaka-*, and suffixed with *-taka* to give *vakalolotaka*, the meaning becomes

'to boil in coconut milk'. The basic word *kere* (simmer) becomes a verb in a similar way, *vakerekeretaka*, the reduplication of *kere* giving a continuous sense.

Entailments: hyponymy relationship

Most of the relationships in this lexical field are hyponymy relationships, one way entailments.

<i>Sa vakariri na ika</i>	entails	<i>Sa saqa na ika</i>
asp. poach art. fish		asp. cook art. fish
(The fish is poached)		(The fish is cooked)

but:

<i>Sa saqa na ika</i>	does not entail	<i>Sa vakariri na ika</i>
(The fish is cooked)		(The fish is poached.)

This is because the fish might be boiled, fried or baked.

Synonymy relationship

There are lexemes which are synonymous in Fijian. These are *baovi*, *bayavo* and *tusala*. Thus:

<i>Sa baovi na ika</i>	entails	<i>Sa bayavo na ika</i>
asp. broil art. fish		asp. broil art. fish
(The fish is broiled in banana leaves)		(The fish is broiled in banana leaves)

and we can also say that:

<i>Sa bayavo na ika</i>	entails	<i>Sa baovi na ika</i>
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This is a two-way entailment relationship and the above sentences are paraphrases of each other.

Binary antonymy relationship

The cooking process *saqa* denotes a transition from a raw state (*droka* in Fijian) to a cooked state (*buta*). These two adjectives, *buta* and *droka*, are in a binary antonymy relationship. To test the hypothesis:

E buta na kakana entails *E sega ni droka na kakana*
Cook art. food 3P neg. comp. uncooked art. food
(The food is cooked) (The food is not uncooked)

E droka na kakana entails *E sega ni buta na kakana*
(The food is uncooked) (The food is not cooked)

E sega ni buta na kakana entails *E droka na kakana*
(The food is not cooked) (The food is uncooked)

E sega ni droka na kakana entails *E buta na kakana*
(The food is not uncooked) (The food is cooked)

However, one may argue against the validity of classifying cooked *buta* and uncooked *droka* as binary antonyms because food can be half-cooked. Depending on the context of the utterance, half-cooked food can be considered cooked or uncooked. For example, if a customer orders a rare steak s/he will get a half-cooked steak but in this context the steak is considered cooked. However, if another customer orders a well-done steak and receives a rare steak, s/he would consider the food uncooked.

Summary

Table 1 summarises this discussion on Fijian verbs of cooking.

Table 1 Summary of Fijian verbs of cooking

Fijian	English	Food to be cooked	Non-fat	Fat/oil/liquid	Direct Heat lolo	Special features
saqa ₁	cook ₃					
BOIL/SAQA₂						
saqa ₂	boil ₁					
bue	boil ₂	water	+	-		Bubbles seen and vapour escapes.
vakarakara	boil ₂	veg	+	-		Used mainly for green leafy veges.
vakerekere	simmer	veg. protein carbohydrate	+	+		
kovu	steam	seafood	+	-		The food is wrapped in banana leaves.
vakalolo	cook in coconut milk	veg. protein	-	+		
riri	poach	veg. fish fruits	+	+		
suvu	soup	protein	+	-		Eggs, seafood excluded.
sitiu	stew	protein	+	-		Thickening is added.
suruwa		fish crabs etc	+	+		Spice is added.
FRY/TAVUTEKE						
tavuteke	fry	veg. protein	-	+		Also means frying pan.
qisi	brown	veg. protein	-	+		Excludes oven browning.
BROIL/TAVU						
tavu	broil toast grill	veg. protein carbohydrates	-	-	+	

Fijian	English	Food to be cooked	Non-fat liquid	Fat/oil/lolo	Direct Heat	Special features
bayavo baovi tusala	broil something soft in banana leaves	fish shellfish	-	-	+	
utuvi tatavu	broil in bamboo plank barbecue	seafood beef, fish chicken pork	-	- +	+	
BAKE/VAVI						
vavi	bake roast	carbo-hydrate veg. protein cakes bread	-	+		Term covers cooking in earth oven or gas/electric stove.

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Directions: Journal of Educational Studies Vol. 22 No. 2 Dec. 2000

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