SHORTER COMMUNICATION

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS REMEDIED FOR RAGA, AN OCEANIC LANGUAGE

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In a publication which may well become a standard reference source on the Oceanic languages (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002), the descriptive sketch of the Raga language (Crowley 2002), spoken in North Pentecost, Vanuatu, is credited as being “Abstracted” by Crowley, “the major source” being Walsh (1966), “with additional material provided by Walsh and Lini (1981), as well as George Hinge” (Crowley 2002:626). This sketch contains statements on some phonological, phonotactic and orthographic matters which are at variance with my observation and understanding of the relevant facts. Raga examples below, except for those in quoted material, are in the 1972 orthography referred to in both the text of the section on orthography and Table 1 at the end of that section.

RAGA PHONOLOGY—THE LABIAL FRICATIVES

In Crowley’s listing of the Raga consonant phonemes (2002:626) the first column, for the labials that have labialised release, contains b\textsuperscript{w} v\textsuperscript{w} m\textsuperscript{w} and the second column, for the simple labials, contains b v m. This presentation does not make it clear that while the first and third items in each column are bilabial, the second item in each column is labio-dental, as described by Walsh (1966:13, 1982:236, 1995:809). That Raga has these labio-dental fricatives is particularly noteworthy given that several neighbouring languages, including Apma\textsuperscript{4} in Central Pentecost, each have a bilabial rather than a labio-dental fricative.

RAGA PHONOTACTICS—SOME PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Crowley’s section on phonotactics (2002:626-27) includes:

Words can begin with vowels or consonants. Both open and closed syllables are permitted in the final syllable of a word. The only consonants that can end a word are the nasals /m/, /n/ and /η/, the fricatives /v/, /s/ and /x/, and the lateral /l/. In other positions only open syllables are permitted. This means that there are no phonemic consonant clusters.
As I interpret it, Crowley is here implying: (i) that closed syllables do not occur word-initially or word-medially, but only word-finally; (ii) that when a word ends with a closed syllable, only any one of the seven specified consonants can occur word-finally; and (iii) that, as a consequence of (i) above, there are no intra-word phonemic consonant clusters.

These claims are at variance with conclusions based on my experience of these aspects of Raga phonotactics. The claims are considered below in the light of:

(a) “The possible syllable shapes are V, CV, CVC, and VC” (Walsh 1966:11).
(b) “The syllable shapes preclude any intra-syllabic CC or VV sequences. Sequences of not more than two consonant phonemes occur across syllable boundaries within an ICS [intonation contour span]” (Walsh 1966:17).
(c) “Reduplication, either total or partial, is found for many verbs, and usually signifies that the action is repeated, frequentative, or habitual” (Walsh 1995:815).
(d) The possibility of some Raga words having both open and closed final syllable variants, with the latter occurring in faster speech(Walsh 1966:21-22), as exemplified in a sample text of moderately fast speech (Walsh 1966:78-79).5

**Occurrence Possibilities of Closed Syllables within the Raga Word**

Crowley’s claim that the occurrence of closed syllables is confined to the word-final position is at variance with the demonstrable presence of CVC syllables word-initially and word-medially, and of VC syllables word-initially, as in the following examples, in which colons indicate syllable boundaries:


That closed syllables are not restricted to word-final occurrence makes the presence of intra-word consonant clusters inevitable.

**Restrictions on Consonant Occurrence Word-finally in Raga**

Crowley’s claim that when a Raga word ends with a closed syllable only “the nasals /m/, /nn/ and /η/, the fricatives /v/, /s/, and /x/, and the lateral /l/” can occur word-finally (2002:626-27) is at variance with the occurrence, particularly in faster speech, of some other consonants in this position, e.g., /l/ in *atatu ~ atat* ‘person’ and /k/ in *gaku ~ gak* ‘my [foodstuff] for me to eat’.

**Consonant Clusters Within the Raga Word**

Crowley’s implied claim that in Raga there are no phonemic consonant clusters within words is at variance with the demonstrable intra-word presence of sequences
of not more than two consonant phonemes. Such sequences occur both inter-
morphemically and intra-morphemically. Inter-morphemic consonant phoneme
clusters occur in many multi-morphemic (usually bi-morphemic) words, intra-
morphemic clusters occur in a smaller number of words, and consonant clusters
occur in many words which are the product of partial reduplication. As has been
noted above, the fact that closed syllables are not restricted to word-final occurrence
makes the presence of intra-word consonant clusters inevitable.

In the examples below of intra-word consonant clusters morpheme boundaries
within words are indicated by hyphens.

Inter-morphemic consonant clusters occur in the compound pronoun + tense/aspect
+ trial marker forms ga-m-dol ‘we excl.-action in progress-trial marker’, gi-m-dol
‘you-action in progress- trial marker’, ra-m-dol ‘they-action in progress-trial marker’,
and ta-m-dol ‘we incl.-action in progress-trial marker’.

They also occur in many other compound forms, including words such as an-tahi
‘shore’ [lit. ‘at-ocean’], at-mate ‘ghost/spirit’ [lit. ‘person-dead’], bwat-mwahu ‘bald-
headed’ [lit. ‘head-bald’], tal-vwalau ‘sennit steering-rope for adjusting canoe sail’
[lit. ‘rope-steer’], ut-metue ‘potential garden-land’ [lit. ‘place-ready/mature’], and
vev-huri ~ bev-huri ‘discuss’ [lit. ‘talk-about’].

Consonant clusters in compound forms are frequently to be found in place-names,
e.g., A-bwatu-n-tora [lit. ‘at-base-of-k.o. tree’], and Lul-tono [lit. ‘in-mangrove’]; in
names of fauna terminal taxa, e.g., man-wali-rau ‘k.o. bird’ [lit. ‘bird-copulate-leaf’],
butubut-memea ‘k.o. small ant’ [lit. ‘small ant-red’], and sibwe-malumu ‘k.o. fish’
[lit. ‘belly-soft’]; and in names of flora terminal taxa, e.g., mat-gogona ‘k.o. tree’ [lit.
‘eye-closed/restricted’], and bwet-hudaligi ‘k.o. taro’ [lit. ‘taro-ask’].

Many of the inter-morphemic consonant clusters in Raga compound words are
the result of elision of a morpheme-final vowel in the compounding process, as, for
example with manu ‘bird’ and malageha ‘green’ being compounded as man-malageha
‘k.o. bird’, and with bwatu ‘head’ and mwahu ‘bald’ being compounded as bwat-
mwahu ‘bald-headed’.

There are not many Raga words in which sequences of two consonant phonemes
occur within a morpheme. Among them are: balsi-na ‘its side/edge’, hantai ‘bad/
improper/badly’, liñsi ‘large flange root’ and mañsi-na ‘his/her/its saliva’.

Sequences of two consonant phonemes occur in many words that are products of
partial reduplication, e.g., gasi ~ gasi ‘bite’ > gasgasi ~ gasgasi ‘bite continually’,
malagelo ‘boy’ > malmalagelo ‘boys’, vano ~ bano ‘go’ > vanvano ~ banvano ‘go
frequently or continually’, vilehi ‘quick/quickly/lightning’ < vilvilehi ‘very quickly’
and vinivihi ~ binihi ‘think’ > vinvinivihi ~ binbinivihi ‘think continually’.

There are several words which, on the available evidence, are not partial
reduplications of words in current use or remembrance, and which contain sequences
of two consonant phonemes, e.g., helhelo ‘swim on back’, latlate ‘brimful’, lonloni
‘provocatively’, manevnevi ‘be(come) thin’, siñsiñi ‘wooden slit-drum’ and teltele
‘k.o. snake’. Words of this kind may well have resulted from the partial reduplication,
at some time in the past, of forms that no longer exist in the language.

Most, and possibly all, the consonant clusters in words with partial reduplication
are the result of the incompleteness of the reduplication consisting of non-realisation
of the vowel of a CV syllable, thus producing a reduplicated portion that ends with a
consonant, e.g., \textit{vano} \textasciitilde \textit{bano} ‘go’ \textasciitilde \textit{vanzano} \textasciitilde \textit{banzano} ‘go frequently or continually’,
and \textit{malagelo} ‘boy’ \textasciitilde \textit{malmalagelo} ‘boys’.

**RAGA ORTHOGRAPHY—SOME PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

In the context of reliance primarily on the conventional 26-letter alphabet, the
orthographic problem areas in Raga are:

(i) the presence of three pairs of consonant sounds where each pair has a simple member
and a member with labialised release, namely the bilabial stops [b] and [bw], the
bilabial nasals [m] and [mw], and the labio-dental fricatives [v] and [vw];
(ii) the presence of both alveolar and velar nasals, [n] and [ŋ]; and
(iii) the presence of both a homorganically prenasalised velar stop, [ŋg], and a velar
fricative, [x].

The first Raga orthography, devised by Codrington (1885:431-32), used, for the
sounds noted under (i) above, both “b” and “p” for [b], “q” for [bw], “m” for [m],
italic “m” for [mw], “v” for [v] and “w” for both [vw] and [w]; for the sounds under
(ii), non-italic “n” for [n] and italic “n” for [ŋ]; and for the sounds under (iii), italic
“g” for [ŋg] and non-italic “g” for [x].

Codrington had first used “q” in his orthography for Mota (1877) to represent a
sound that he described in the introductory material to his Mota Dictionary (Codrington
and Palmer 1896:xiii) as “a compound sound in which k, p, w, are present, sometimes
the guttural sometimes the labial predominating”. This Mota [kpw] sound corresponds
historically with Raga [bw], which may well have contributed to his decision to use
“q” in his Raga orthography.

The Melanesian Mission Press (at Norfolk Island until around 1920, then at
Guadalcanal until the Second World War came to the Solomon Islands and, after 1945,
at Taroaniara, on the island of Nggela) broadly followed Codrington’s orthography
until around the 1950s, except that “p” was discarded quite early in the piece, and the
italic letters were often not used consistently. The continuing use of “q” in the Raga
orthography down to the 1950s may well have been reinforced by the Mission’s use
of Mota as the \textit{lingua franca} for its Melanesian operations. Any such reinforcement
would have declined and disappeared during the 1950s when the Mission ceased to
use Mota for this purpose.

By 1970, for \textit{Book Tatato la Avoan ata Raga}, a Prayer Book in the Raga language,
containing over 460 pages of Raga text, and with an initial print run of 2,000, the
Diocese of Melanesia Press had discarded “q” and was using “bw” for [bw], “mw”
for [mw] sometimes but not always, and “vw” for [vw]; italic “n” for [ŋ]; italic “g”
for [ŋg] and non-italic “g” for [x].

The use of italic “n” and “g” in an otherwise non-italic orthography was not visually
effective, was often not done consistently and, confusingly, had to be reversed when
Raga text was presented in italic type. Accordingly, in 1972, faced with the need to
decide on an optimal orthography for lexicographic and textual purposes, Richard
Leona and I, in consultation with Walter Liñi and other Raga speakers, decided to use
the macroned “ṅ” for the velar nasal, and “ṅ” for the prenasalised velar stop. Use of this orthography is exemplified in Walsh and Liní (1981), Walsh (1982), Walsh and Leona (1996) and Walsh, Leona and Pond (2000).

In Crowley (2002) the section on orthography (pp. 627-28) states:

There has been a long history of education in the Raga speaking area since early missionary times, and there is a substantial body of evangelical materials written in the language. In the established orthography, the labio-velar stop /bw/ is represented by q, while other labio-velars are the digraphs mw and vw. The fricative /x/ is represented by ġ, and /ŋ/ by ā.

The claim that in the “established orthography” [bw] is represented by “q” is anachronistic, given that the Melanesian Mission Press abandoned this symbol in favour of the /bw/ digraph sometime (probably earlier rather than later) between the 1950s and 1970. This anachronistic claim may have come about through Crowley’s not having consulted post-1950s publications in Raga by the Mission Press. His claim that the “established orthography” uses macroned “ṅ” for [x] is erroneous, and runs counter to the consistent and long-term use by the Melanesian Mission Press of non-italic /g/ for [x] and italic /ṅ/ for [ŋ].

Table 1: The developmental sequence of solutions in the problem areas of the Raga orthography, plus Crowley’s version of the “established orthography”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[b]</th>
<th>[bw]</th>
<th>[v]</th>
<th>[vw]</th>
<th>[m]</th>
<th>[mw]</th>
<th>[n]</th>
<th>[ŋ]</th>
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<th>[x]</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Codrington</td>
<td>b~p</td>
<td>q</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>mw</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>g</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOM Press</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>bw</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>vw</td>
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<td>mw</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>g</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leona/Liní/Walsh</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>bw</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>vw</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>mw</td>
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<td>b</td>
<td>q</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>vw</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>mw</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>ā</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>ġ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Raga data in Crowley (2002) are in italic type, but since this is the product of an editorial convention rather than an intrinsic quality of the orthography, the Crowley items in Table 1 are presented in non-italic type to facilitate comparison with the other orthographies, in the first two of which the use of italic type in columns 8 and 9 is contrastively significant.

CODA

I have attempted to demonstrate how the various claims which I have questioned are at variance with the relevant facts of the Raga language as I have experienced...
them. I have questioned these claims because to the best of my knowledge each one gives the reader defective information concerning an aspect of the language. Once such information appears in a reputable publication it unfortunately tends, if left uncorrected, to be taken by the ordinary reader to be accurate and authoritative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of these comments was part of a paper that was programmed for presentation at COOL6, the Sixth Conference on Oceanic Linguistics, held in Port Vila, Vanuatu, 4 to 9 July 2004. As I was eventually unable to be at the conference the paper was tabled in absentia. Fieldwork and research underlying the comments were funded in varying proportions and at various times by the Australian National University, the Australian Research Grants Committee, the Myer Foundation, the University of Auckland, and the University of Sydney. This latest version has benefited from comments and suggestions made by two JPS referees, for which my thanks.

NOTES

1. In their Raga entry Lynch and Crowley (2001:64), note that “Grimes (1996) indicates that the preferred local name for Raga is Hano, though local people inform us that this is simply a word meaning ‘what’, and is not known to be used by anybody as a language name”. My own experience of the Raga language is in accord with the view attributed to local people by Lynch and Crowley.
2. My contact with the Raga language began in 1962, and has continued through to the present in the form of ongoing lexicographic and textual work.
3. The description in Walsh (1966) of the Raga /v/ and /vw/ fricative phonemes as labio-dental was based on observation of the relevant articulations in the speech of five expatriate Raga speakers who were students in Auckland in the mid-1960s. That these phonemes were labio-dental, rather than bilabial, was confirmed during fieldwork in the Raga speech community on Pentecost Island in 1969.
4. The labial consonants of Apma are described briefly in Walsh 1982:238.
5. When in 1969 I had my first experience of working in the Raga speech community on Pentecost Island, hearing the language daily in action around me made evident the sheer range and frequency of this elision of word-final vowels.
6. For a description of the syntactically conditioned verb-initial consonant variation present here and elsewhere in the Raga examples, see Walsh 1982:236-37.

REFERENCES


