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Victoria Fromkin's Reform-Pakuni of 1995

A review and commentary of Victoria A. Fromkin's "The Grammar and Lexicon/Dictionary of PAKU"

Thomas Alexander

Pakuni is the language spoken by the "monkey men" in the 1970's TV show Land Of The Lost. This language was created for the show by the late UCLA linguistics professor Victoria Fromkin. Fans of the show and the language have long been wishing to have access to "Fromkin's original 300 words." It turns out that the "300 words" are probably legendary, but a full description of the language by Fromkin herself has been circulating, even though as of this writing, it has not been posted anywhere online.

This description of the language begins with a notice: "© Copywrite 1995, by Victoria A. Fromkin, Author." The spelling of copyright (repeated the same way on every page) seems symbolic of the many typos and other errors in the document. Nevertheless, as a document by the original author of the language, it is a goldmine of information for the fan. This is the most complete description of Pakuni available, and the only one by the original author. The merits of the document are self-evident, so this review will focus mostly on the shortcomings, and on the elements that are different from the language as used in the show.

Note on the name of the language: Fromkin calls the language "Paku." This is the singular form of a typical speaker of the language. "Pakuni" is the plural form. While I agree with the logic of using the word "Paku" as the name of the language, I have chosen to call it "Pakuni" in this document, as this is the what the language is called in the show and it is how most fans refer to the language.

Note on the term "Reform-Pakuni": Fromkin's 1995 description includes many differences from the language as used in the show. Some of these may have been mistakes. In some cases, she says explicitly that she's "correcting" the language. To distinguish the language described in this document from "the language as used on the show", I have chosen to refer to the former as a reform by the original author.

Phonology:

Fromkin begins her description with the pronunciation of vowels (see CIPD, the Comprehensive Illustrated Pakuni Dictionary, originally published on fiatlingua.org on February 1, 2014), and then describes some phonological rules related to consonants. For example, CH and J (as in church and judge respectively) only appear before A, E, and I. Nasal consonants (M, N, and NG) vary depending on what consonants they are

near. The syllable structure is listed as (C) V (N), that is, an optional consonant, a vowel, and an optional nasal. The only examples of consonant clusters are with the use of the negative, which is a nasal that varies depending on the first consonant on the stem. Her examples are **ba** ‘come’ **mba** ‘not come’ and **ting** ‘push’ **nting** ‘not push’.

Morphology:

Nouns in both original Pakuni and reform-Pakuni begin with a vowel “representing a semantic class.” Before her 1995 grammar came to light, it was already clear that Pakuni had semantic class, but it was difficult to determine from the show alone what these classes were. Was it divided by animals versus plants? Sentient versus non-sentient? Living versus nonliving? A number of the words were known from written sources (such as the TV guide article) but most were only known from the TV show, and as the actors were not linguists, they often made mistakes - especially with pronouncing E distinct from A. It was difficult to tell whether two nouns were in the same category, or whether they were in different categories with one of them simply being a mispronunciation.

Reform-Pakuni includes four distinct noun classes. Unfortunately, this is one aspect of the language for which Fromkin specifically states as a correction from the “original scripts.” Another issue is that this correction contains at least one glaring error.

The noun-categories in reform-Pakuni are:

- a-nouns - “human” (i.e. paku or human)
- i-nouns - animal
- o-nouns - collective, abstract, or mass nouns.
- e-nouns - inanimate.

The example for i-class nouns is “egamba” (dinosaur). This word appears in the show as “agamba” (less often as “agomba”) but it would have to be “igamba” if it’s an i-class noun. It’s obvious that “egamba” is a mistake here, but it’s not clear whether it’s a simple typographical error, or whether “egamba” was the original version and was mispronounced in the show. The pronunciation in the show is clearly and repeatedly “agomba.”

These noun classes are not followed consistently even within the 1995 grammar and lexicon. In the grammar section, “ega” (lethal substance) is given as an example of an e-class noun. In the lexicon section, the word is listed as “iga”. The lexicon also lists “igamba” giving the impression that Fromkin perhaps hadn’t made up her mind about the distinction between i-nouns and e-nouns, and perhaps had switched the letters for each category, and perhaps the kind of nouns that belong in each one.

Within the reform-Pakuni, it’s fairly clear what is intended by a-class nouns (people, family relationships, and similar), and o-class nouns (concepts such as everything, manhood, good, or evil; non-countable substances like food, water, fire, or paint). The e-

class nouns seem to include countable non-living objects and living plants (cactus, day, door) and parts of animate things such as hair.

The i-class nouns are a little harder to figure out. This category generally includes animals (including fish and worms), but it also includes inanimate objects such as “ijji” egg, “iga” poison, and “iroshi”[sic] mark, none of which are animals.

This last example is interesting because “iroshi”[sic] is the only example from the show where I glossed a word with an initial I (see CIPD). Both Ta and Chaka use the phrase “iroshi eshisu” (mark of the test) in different scenes of second episode of the show, and both of them pronounce the initial vowels of each word distinct from each other. It’s difficult to imagine a semantic category that includes “mark” and not “test”, so I might have concluded that this was a mistake in the show.

For comparison, the noun categories from the original show appear to be

People and family relations start with A (amura friend)

Animals start with E or A (ebobo abobo egobi akingo emu amenda)

Plants and some inanimate objects start with E (flower, carrot, house)

More abstract nouns begin with O (water, fire, magic, stone, evil.)

Adjectives, according to the 1995 grammar, can be formed with the suffix -sa. **Adverbs** are formed from nouns and adjectives with the suffix -chi. The example given is the following sequence: abu (child) -> abusa (childish) -> busachi (childishly.) It’s not explained when it is necessary to keep the noun-class prefix, and when it’s necessary to drop it when forming words.

Verbs are uninflected except for future tense. The prefix ko- is used to make a verb future tense. In the show, “ko” is often pronounced as if it’s an independent word, so many of the fan glossaries have it listed as “will.”

Numbers were rarely used in the show, but since Chaka was the “first one” to make art, we learn the word “todari” (first). The grammar includes a Pakuni number system which is not incompatible with this word. The system is schematic, based on the sounds of the words, and it’s a base 7 system. It’s not clear from the show why they would use a base 7 system, and Fromkin doesn’t explain it in her grammar. A paku has 5 fingers just like a human does, and since the system is schematic, it’s difficult to imagine that these are the names of seven common objects (such as thumb, index, middle, ring, pinky, wrist, elbow) that the pakuni may use for counting.

The numbers toda, doda, koda, goda, poda, boda soda. The odd digits begin with a voiced consonant. The even digits start with a voiceless consonant. Numbers larger than seven are formed by multiples of seven.

Sotoda - seven plus one.

Sododa - seven plus two.

Dosonitoda - two sevens plus one.

Linguistic elements in the show:

The system of numbers brings us to an important point. Fromkin was not a fan of *Land of the Lost*. She mentioned on a few occasions (see notes below) that she'd never watched the show. It appears she created the language independent of the fictional world in which it was set. Her schematic base-seven number system may be interesting, but it's not clear how it relates to the fictional world. Fans of the show need to keep this in mind when reading into details such as whether Pakuni has a native word for Sleestack. It may be fun to speculate, but ultimately it seems many of these details were not considered by the creators of the show because the people who knew the backstory were not the people creating the linguistic elements, and the people creating the linguistic elements apparently did not know the backstory.

She did make occasional references to Pakuni over the years, and used it as examples in her classes. She apparently thought it was an obscure program till the late 80's or early 90's when people who had seen it as children started showing up in her classes. This 1995 document appears to be a cobbled-together answer to requests for more information, perhaps from multiple students between 1991 and 1995.

There is no mention of pakus or paku culture in the 1995 document, nor is there any mention that this is a language spoken by non-humans. What she says is:

A language developed for use in the television series *LAND OF THE LOST* produced by SID & MARTY KROFFT TELEVISION PRODUCTIONS, INC originally shown on NBC in 1974, 1975

Fans of the show have long been wishing for a complete, authentic, and authoritative description of the language. While there is quite a bit of useful information in the 1995 document, this is not the ultimate description fans have been waiting for. Even without considering the disconnect from the language as presented on TV in 1974, the 1995 document is missing some details of the language from Fromkin's own pen.

For example, Fromkin was co-author of the textbook [An Introduction to Language](#). In this book, there is a short list of vocabulary, including the words *adusa* and *abuma* (boy and girl) never referenced on the show (however *abuma* dates back at least 1976). "Abuma" made it into the 1995 lexicon. It was also included in a TV Guide article on Pakuni, but no word for boy is listed. One wonders what other interesting details may have been inadvertently left out.

Partial list of errors (large and small):

ni sa - listed as two words (should be *nisa*).

Adverb is abbreviated as "adf".

jo (to jump) and *ajo* (jumper) violates phonology.

The following examples contradict the pronouns used elsewhere in the document and as used in the show. The third example looks like the editor got a little over-enthusiastic with A's instead of E's.

Ya ba! - Come! [should be *ye ba!*].

Ba ya? - Are you coming? [should be *ba ye?*]

Ya ba a? - Are you coming? [should be *ye ba e?*]

de is listed as both "to do" and "to look", and yet there is also an example phrase - "*Sa efi meni dang si*" - where "*si*" is clearly intended to mean "to do" but is listed nowhere in the lexicon.

The syllable "cha" is explicitly permitted by the phonology (consider the name Chaka), and yet there is not one word in the 1995 lexicon containing this syllable. It is interesting to note that the word "kesa" (found in the Pocket Pakuni Dictionary (1998), but probably not used in the show) is not permitted by the 1995 phonology. It is listed as *chesa* (young) in the 1995 lexicon. The Pocket Pakuni dictionary appears to have systematic errors converting ch to k, because it lists -ki as the adverb ending (-*chi* in both the 1995 document and on the original show). It would be interesting to know what the Pocket Pakuni Dictionary used as its source, since neither "kesa" nor "chesa" appear to have been used in the show.

Notes and appendices follow.

Notes:

With regard to Fromkin never having seen the show, here are some quotes from her.

From <http://www.war-of-the-worlds.co.uk/cv/lotl.htm>

"I have little to say about the show itself. They would send me a script and I would translate the designated portions into Paku and that was the extent of my involvement."

"At the time the show first aired no one knew I had written the language and I had no idea it was a popular program for children. Certainly, my students at that time would not have watched it since they were all college students."

From http://lotl.popapostle.com/html/pearchive_04.html

(originally from an e-mail to Linguist List dated 02 Sep 91 20:33 PDT)

"I think my major claim to fame with the Linguistic 1 students at UCLA is that I wrote a language called PAKU spoken by the Pakuni (monkey people) in a children's TV program called Land of the Lost. I had no idea anyone knew of it and happened to mention it and got a standing ovation from the usual bored, noisy group of 500 students. It seems they keep showing it. For those of you who are Africanists out there -- you will

notice that it is very much like a Kwa language of West Africa. This of course has no relation to any of the linguistic novels. To finish -- re Paku and Land of the Lost -- I never saw the show -- just the scripts which I had to translate into Paku. The whole experience was very funny. They -- the producers were worried about the sear words I wrote in Paku. I tried to convince them that no one would know what they meant anyway but I am not sure they believed me. Anyway, it is a lovely language which I understand children were beginning to pick up (which was my purpose of course) -- nice regular anti-penultimate stress, homorganic nasals, nasalization of vowels before nasals, deletion of final vowels before vowel initial suffixes. A wonderful language! Vicki Fromkin"

Appendix 1 - Partial list of words from the 1995 lexicon not used in the show.

The 1995 lexicon does not include the words *emu* (pig) or *eram* (moon) which featured prominently in the show. It does, however, include a number of root words that were not used in the show. The list below does not include words that were plausibly mispronounced in the show, or even words like *yosa* (fierce) which appear to have been reformed for this lexicon. (It is clearly "gosa" in the show.) Also see *adusa* under "linguistic elements" above. The words listed below appear to be new words, or words that were created in the 70's but for some reason never used in the show above.

binosa - heavy

bongu - beware

buchi - before

abuma - girl

ebunda - cave

chesa - young

chimu - to stop

di - to dare

edungni - balls/testicles

finga - to wave (but "mufinga" was used and appears to mean "don't move.")

fang - to fxxx/copulate

ga - to kill

iga - killer (inan - as in poison). Note the word "tusa" (bad) was used in the show for poison.

egachi - bead

ejiku - stick

jo - to jump

kabi - to wake

kuba - to climb

mer - to defecate [note, this word violates section 2A(3) of the phonology]

ometama - duration/time period

misa - small/little (c.f. ami - mother)

emifo - wall
nuba - to cause
nunji - to hunt
pudo - to lie down
pugasa - next
pumi - to know (see tebo)
opundo - spear
rachisa - sacred
rashi - red (the only color in lexicon)
re - to get/receive (see puchi)
 - to receive (in lexicon twice)
oripa - salt
esam - sun
tebo - to know well (see pumi)
wemu - tall/high
wi - on
owim - wind
yeng - to make

Appendix 2 - an inversion of Fromkin's 1995 Lexicon

Fromkin's 1995 Reform-Pakuni included an English-to-Paku lexicon, which I have inverted to make a Paku-to-English lexicon. All words are part of Fromkin's 1995 work and may or may not have been used in the TV show in this form. Any typographical errors are my own.

Alphabetical order is by root. Usually, this means by first consonant, but I've tried to follow the following arbitrary order when a root is listed in multiple forms:

a-noun form
 verb form
 adjective form
 adverb form
e-noun form
i-noun form
o-noun form

If for some reason I felt it necessary to break from that order, or if I needed to have a sub-entry, I marked it with a double dash (--)

A

a - noun prefix for humans (note, she said human, not paku)

a – and

a? – question word – e.g. Ya ba, a?

B

ba - to come

bako - to bring

ban - to paint

eban - picture

oban – paint (N)

bisa - big

-- abi - big one

-- abibi - giant

-- abisa - huge person

-- ibisa - huge animal

-- ebisa - huge thing

-- ibi - big animal

-- ebi - big thing

abimi - man

bimisa - mannish [These are the same two glosses from the Pocket Pakuni]

bimichi - manly [Dictionary (bimisa and bimIKI) which I found questionable.]

obimi - manhood

binosa - heavy [why not “binasa”?]

bina - to be heavy

bing - to follow

bishika - to vomit

ibobo - allosaur

boda - 6

aboma - leader

bongu - beware

abu - child

busa - childish

busachi - childishly

buchi - before

abuma - girl

ebunda - cave

CH

chesa - young

ache - youth

chi - to chase

chimu - to stop

ching - to pull

D

ada - father

dan - for

dang - must
de - to do (from Phonology section)
- to look (from lexicon)
dena - to need
di - to dare
dinda - to eat
edobi - door
dochi - down
doda - 2
doma - ugly
doru - to throw
odumani - everything
edungni - balls/testicles

e - noun prefix for inanimate

Ff

fa - to take
fang - to fxxx/copulate
efi - thing
-- nefi - nothing
finga - to wave
fo - to say
fusa - quick
-- mfu - to be slow
fusachi - quickly
efurama - ceremony/rite

Gg

ga - to kill
aga - killer
iga - killer (inan) Note: this is listed ias ega in the morphology section.
egachi - bead
igamba - killer lizard (why same noun class as "inan" killer?) ("egamba" in main section.)
gansa – magic(adj)
ogansa – magic(N)
ago/yoo - yes [typo?]
ego - place
-- nego - nowhere
-- ego ejiga - there
goda - 4
igobi - coelophysis
eguga - this
-- ego eguga - here

li

i - noun prefix for non-human animate

Jj

oje – noise

-- jesa - noisy

ji - beg

-- me ji (ye) - please

ejiga - that

ijiji - egg

ejiku - stick

ejiri - house

jito - to thank

ajo - jumper [according to Morphology, “jo” is not a permitted syllable.]

jo - to jump

josa - jumpy

Kk

kasa - happy

-- ngkasa - unhappy

kabi - to wake

ikanga - iguana

ikingo - tyrannosaurus

ko - future verb prefix.

koda - 3

koji - to open

kuba - to climb

ku - to go

-- ye ku wesachi - goodbye.

kun - to fight

Mm

om - to

ema - gift

ma - to give

me - I/me/mine

mechi - more

mer - to defecate [note, this word violates section 2A(3) of the phonology]

ometa - time
-- nometa - never
-- sa ometa
ometama - duration/time period
ami - mother
misa - small/little [c.f motherly]
emifo - wall
mika - to want
iminda - triceratops
mo - to smell
omo - smell
omundi - fear
mu - from
amura - friend

Nn

onam - food
nanda - sorry
nisa - nasty
nisachi - nastily
nira - to tell
eno - day
-- ino [sic] eguga - today - day this. (Compare prefixes for day,
-- ino [sic] pugasa – tomorrow today, tomorrow)
anu/nu - no
nuba - to cause
nun - not [also zero]
anunji - hunter
nunji - to hunt

o - noun prefix for collective or abstract / mass nouns prefix.
om - (prep) to -- also alphabetized under M.

Pp

epa - way/manner
-- sa epa - how
paku - person
-- mapku - no one
pam - to happen
pari - to reason
opari - reason
-- sa opari
epi - light (compare to opi)
-- pisa - light

opi - danger
-- pisa – dangerous
-- ? -- piro - to be in danger
pika - to trade
opima - soup
piro - to be in danger (see also opi)
epo - hair
-- mposa - hairless
poda - 4
pu - to understand
puchi - to get - see re.
pudo - to lie down
pugasa - next
pumi - to know (see tebo)
opundo - spear

Rr

ra - to save
rachisa - sacred
erapa - carrot
rashi - red (the only color in lexicon)
re - to get/receive (see puchi)
- to receive (in lexicon twice)
oripa - salt
aroka - freak/strange one
rokasa - strange
irosi - mark [-i = non-human animate]
ru - to steal
eruna - thorn

Ss

osa [sic] - water
sa - what
--sa efi
--sa paku
--sa ego
--sa epa - how
--sa opari
--sa ometa
esam - sun
esamsam - sunshine (sun with reduplication?)

sansa - sunny (see esam)
si - to do (from syntax section -- possible typo for shi)
sisu - to hear
soda - 7
esuka - land/territory

SHsh

sha - that (relative clauses relativizer)
she - to put
shi - to do
ashi - pretty one
shisa - pretty
ishimi - fish
shinu - to ask
eshisu - test

Tt

ota - fire
tebo - to know well (see pumi)
tiba - to bite
ting - to push
atiri - a quiet one
tiri - quiet
tobi - to greet
toda - 1
todari - 1st
etogo - cactus
otu - evil
-- tusa - evil
-- atu - evil person
-- ito - evil one - non human.
tum - by means of
itushi - worm

Uu

u - in

Ww

wa - she/her/hers

wachi - now

-- wachi a n-wachi - again

wam - to run

we - he him his (note plural is "wani")

wesa - good

-- wesachi - well

owe - the good

wemu - tall/high

wi - on

owim - wind

wo - to have

ewoya - flower

wu - to see

Yy

ya – apparent typo for "ye"

yan - together with (see yeni yeni)

ye - you/your/yours

-- yeni yeni - together

yeng - to make

yoo/ago - yes [typo?]

yosa - fierce [in two different episodes, it's pronounced "gosa" in the show, but never "yosa".]