A GRAMMAR OF VAI

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By

WM. E. WELMERS

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INTRODUCTION

Vai is spoken by probably fewer than 40,000 people, largely along the northwestern coast of Liberia, but extending also into Sierra Leone.[1] It is a Northern Mande language (Welmers 1958), but is not geographically adjacent to any of its closest relatives, not even Kono in Sierra Leone, from which Vai has been separated for about five hundred years. The language is known to its speakers as /váí-wò'ò(ě)/ '(the) Vai language'; what seems to be an older form of the stem, /véí/, is said to be recognized by elderly people but not widely used today. The name is almost certainly of non-Vai origin, as all morphemes with initial /v/ appear to be.[2]

Vai is best known, of course, for its indigenous syllabic writing system, which dates from the early decades of the nineteenth century. More than half of the existing publications on Vai deal primarily or exclusively with this syllabary, which has understandably enthralled almost everyone who has had occasion to learn about it. As for the language itself, there are some materials of a practical pedagogical nature produced by or for the United States Peace Corps; those I have been able to obtain (by Tom Wheeler, no date) reflect no advance over earlier works in terms of linguistic analysis. The only earlier descriptive treatments worthy of note are those of Koelle (1854, republished 1968), Klingenheben (1925-6, 1933), and Heydorn (1971, published posthumously from a manuscript of 1934). Of these, Koelle's work is of considerable historical interest, but understandably falls far short of being an adequate linguistic analysis by modern standards. Klingenheben's work is also far from adequate, and in some respects misleading. Although he discussed tone, for example, he failed to recognize lexical tone in verbs, interpreting all verbs as having low tone (which they do in some, but not all, verbal constructions). He defines grammatical tone only in terms of distinguishing grammatical classes (which is not

a function of tone), and adds that grammatical tone rules are not yet
known. He even makes the preposterous statement that Vai intonation
(which is simple, and very much like intonation in many other Mande
languages) is "Hamitic!" Heydorn's work is not without merit; in less
than forty pages, he presents a reasonably comprehensive and sometimes
perceptive sketch of many aspects of the phonology and grammar of Vai.
There are, however, several respects in which Heydorn is incomplete or
inaccurate. Although he must have been aware of tone in Vai, he total-
ly ignored its presence and function; this is especially strange since
he showed in his work on Kisi (1970, but also dating from the mid-30's)
that he was reasonably competent in handling tone, and the tonal system
of Vai presents no serious problems. In addition, Heydorn noted the
heavily aspectual character of the Vai predicative system, but then
succeeded in obscuring rather than clarifying its structure. The pre-
sent study, therefore, appears to be the first that can be considered
anything like an adequate description of Vai.[3]

   This description is based on work done in Liberia in 1974 and 1975,
almost entirely with the Rev. Fr. C. K. Kandakai.[4] Much of the analy-
sis was actually done in a little less than two weeks of full-time work
in March, 1974, which was then supplemented by part-time work, concen-
trating largely on lexicography, in May through July, 1974, and by ad-
ditional work in June and July, 1975. This may appear to be a dange-
rously short time, the more so because medical considerations unfortu-
nately made it necessary for the work to be done entirely in Monrovia;
substantial experience in Vai-land itself would, of course, have been
greatly preferred. It should be noted, however, that the publications
cited above, and also notes prepared in 1973 by the Rev. John and Mrs.
Isabel Anderson, provided valuable hints as to what might be expected
in the language. Perhaps more significantly, the author's prior expe-
rience with Mandekan and with the Southwestern Mande languages (especi-
ally Kpelle), and concurrent work on Manya, made it far easier than it
would otherwise have been to identify grammatical categories and con-
structions in Vai. At the same time, of course, it would be presumptu-
ous to claim that the data included in this study are completely free
from error, or that the analysis is exhaustive or incapable of refine-
ment.

A lesser amount of work was done with Jay Foboi of Monrovia. A final recheck of the data from Chapter 13 on was made with Mr. Abbas Massalay, a speaker of Vai residing in Los Angeles. I am also deeply indebted to Mrs. Gail Stewart, the preeminent authority on the Vai syllabic writing system, for suggestions and criticisms based on her knowledge and experience.

The gracious cooperation and assistance of The Institute for Liberian Languages (a division of the Lutheran Bible Translators), with whose personnel it has been an inestimable privilege to work during these two visits to Liberia, played a large part in making this and other linguistic research possible. In addition to such scholarly significance as this study may have, it is hoped and intended that it will be of practical use in the Institute's program, and of value to the Vai people.

There has been a great deal of discussion of the question of a practical alphabetic orthography for Vai: whether such an orthography is needed at all, and, if so, just what form it should take. The transcription used in this study can be construed as representing my personal recommendation, on a combination of technical linguistic and practical grounds. At the same time, of course, I cannot presume to dictate an authoritative or definitive orthography. Final decisions must await the consideration of those who will ultimately use the orthography, preferably after careful testing. I can only urge, most vigorously but also sympathetically, that any alternative orthographic conventions that may be chosen should not obscure the phonologic contrasts and the principles of word formation that are significant in Vai.

The photo-offset masters for this work were typewritten by the author, who must therefore accept full responsibility for any typographical errors and editorial irregularities.

CHAPTER 1
CONSONANTS

1.1.   The consonantal phonology of Vai provides so much unusual and
fascinating evidence for the lexical history of the language that, even
in an essentially descriptive study, it seems worthwhile to treat the
consonants by groups which unquestionably reflect historical develop-
ments in the language.   It is convenient, for this purpose, first to
treat consonants in stem-initial as opposed to other positions.

The stem-initial consonants of Vai may be divided into two major ca-
tegories.   The first comprises only those consonants which reflect the
proto-Northern-Mande (PNM) consonantal system.   This does not mean, of
course, that these modern Vai consonants are identical with their PNM
ancestors; on the contrary, it is clear that some phonologic changes
from PNM to modern Vai have taken place, most conspicuously a merger of
PNM *k and *g as modern Vai /k/ (a development shared by Mandekan, but
not by some other languages that diverged earlier from the PNM stock).
Nor does this mean, of course, that every stem beginning with one of
these consonants is inherited from PNM; on the contrary, it is possible
to identify a number of words of non-PNM origin which have initial con-
sonants in this group.   What is significant about this category is, ra-
ther, that all inherited PNM stems retained in Vai -- along with an un-
determined and probably undeterminable number of innovated stems -- be-
gin with one of these consonants.   They are thus in a true sense the
"inherited consonants" of Vai.   There are twelve such consonants:

	t		k	kp
b			j	
f	s			
w	l			
m	n	ny		

The phonetic values of a few of these require special comment. /kp/ is a doubly articulated (velar and bilabial) stop, with some oral suction preceding the simultaneous release. /b/ is implosive, /ɓ/. /j/ may best be described as a voiced palatal stop; there is very little affrication in its release. /l/ is, for many speakers, usually an implosive stop, [ɗ], which could as validly occupy the blank in the voiced alveolar stop position in the chart above; for many other speakers, however, it is commonly a lateral resonant as the symbol suggests. (In contrast with stems beginning with this /l/, there are a very few stems which may be cited with initial [l], never [ɗ], by some speakers, but which are usually heard with no initial consonant in context after another word. Apart from independent citation, none of the forms in question ever begins an utterance. This elusive phonological entity, represented in this study as /'/, is treated along with intervocalic consonants in 1.8 below.) Before one of the vowels /i, e, ε/, /w/ is rare (and undoubtedly not "inherited"), and is usually a close bilabial resonant with no protrusion of the lips, /ʋ/; this is especially noticeable in phrase-medial position after a vowel ending a preceding word. A phonetic [w] may be heard in forms transcribable as [ᴿwíì] 'boil', [wéé] (a sentence-final particle), and [wὲέ] 'today'; these are, however, variants of [ᴿwúlì] or [ᴿwúì], [wóé], and [wɔ̀lέ] or [wɔ̀έ], and Vai speakers accept /ᴿwú'ì/, /wóé/, /wɔ'έ/ as valid interpretations.[5] Representative examples of these twelve initial consonants are:

t:	tâŋ	'ten'	tó'á	'rat'
	té'é	'sun, day'	tó'ò	'ear'
	tìὲ	'chicken'	tú'ú	'oil'
k:	kàí	'man'	kí'à	'path, road'
	ká'ó	'moon, month'	kò'á	'cloth'
	kàmá	'elephant'	kòndé	'bird'
	kéŋ	'house'	kŭŋ	'head'
kp:	ᴿkpáí	'chase away'	kpὲnὲ	'catfish'
	kpéŋgbé	'frog'	kpò'ó	'skin; paper'
	kpέ	'alcoholic drink'	kpɔ̀ŋ	'monkey'
b:	bǎ	'goat'	bó'í	'medicine'
	ᴿbè'á	'fall'	bɔ̀'ɔ́	'bag, cap'
	bìndá	'spoon'	bú	'abdomen, width'

j: jàmbá   'leaf'   jɔ̌   'who?'
     jɛ̀'ìmà   'evening'   jɔ̌ŋ   'slave'
     jí   'water'   jù'ú   'vine, rope'

f: fǎ   'father'   féŋ   'thing'
     fàndé   'cotton'   fó'ó   'empty'
     fè'á   'two'   fúndé   'mushroom'

s: sàkpá   'three'   sɛ̀né   'farm'
     sámbà   'basket'   sòná   'rain'
     sěŋ   'stone'   sùɛ́   'animal, meat'

w: wé'è   (neg. mphm.)   wá'í   'thorn'
     wíkì   'week'   wó'á   'virgin forest'
     ᴿwú'ì   'boil'   wù'ú   'dog'
     wóé   (particle)   wónyɛ̀   'driver ants'

l: lá   'mouth'   lòndɔ́   'one'
     lɛ̀ndɛ́   'vehicle'   lɔ́ŋ   'cooked rice'
     lìfí   'night'   lùmà   'ground'

m: mànjá   'chief'   mɔ̌   'person'
     mɛ̀ɛ́   'this'   mùsú   'woman'

n: náánì   'four'   nɔ́ɔ́   'dirty'
     nìí   'cow'   núú   'there'

ny: nyàá   'lice'   nyíŋ   'tooth'
     nyíɛ́   'fish'   nyɔ̀ɔ̌   'corn'

1.2.   The second category of stem-initial consonants may be called "innovated consonants." All of them have quite clearly become part of the Vai phonologic system after the phonologic developments resulting in the inherited system outlined above had been completed. A corrolary of this fact is that no stem beginning with one of these consonants is inherited from PNM. In fact, even Kono has no forms at all similar to stems beginning with any of these consonants, except in a very few cases which quite obviously reflect recent and independent adoptions of English words. These consonants have thus been added to the Vai phonologic system within the last five centuries or so, some of them quite possibly within the past century. What is rather remarkable is that the "innovated consonants" of Vai outnumber the "inherited consonants."

There are fourteen of them, as follows:

p		c		
bh	dh		g	gb
				h
v	z			
			ŋ	
mb	nd	nj	ŋg	

Phonetically, /bh/ and /dh/ are non-implosive voiced stops, [b] and [d]. The symbolization chosen here has a statistical basis, with useful implications for a practical alphabetic orthography of Vai. In terms of lexical frequency, the implosive /b/ ([ɓ]) is six times as common as the non-implosive /bh/ ([b]). Initial /l/ (often phonetically an implosive [ɗ]) is about five times as common as the non-implosive /dh/ ([d]). In text frequency, the predominance of /b/ and /l/ would be even more conspicuous. Further, speakers of Vai recognize the phonetic parallelism between /bh/ and /dh/, and are quite aware of their relative infrequency. /g/ is also non-implosive, but need not be specially marked as such since there is no implosive counterpart. /gb/, like /kp/, is doubly articulated, with slight oral suction preceding the simultaneous release.

Among the rest of these consonants, /c/, like /j/, is a palatal stop with little affrication. /v/ is always labiodental, and thus in contrast with both allophones of /w/, [w] and [ʋ]. In initial /mb, nd, nj, ŋg/, the nasal is somewhat more prominent than the oral release, but is not syllabic and does not carry a tone of its own. The question of a contrast between /mb/ and /m/ (etc.) will be further discussed in connection with vowels in 2.5 below. (In quite a different category are sequences of a syllabic nasal with high tone, the first person singular pronoun, followed by a stem-initial consonant.) Before discussing the statistical situation in more detail, the following are representative examples of the innovated initial consonants; in the case of /c, ŋ, mb, nd, nj, ŋg/, all recorded examples are given here:

p:	pàkáì	'papaya'	pí'ìŋ	'turtledove (?)'
	péwé	'mongoose'	pò	'heron'

c: câŋ   'snail (sp.)'
      cɔ́cì   'church'
      cɔ̀bɔ̀cɔ̀bɔ̀ ~ cɔ̀ìcɔ̀ì   (ideophone describing wateriness of mud)
      cɔ̀kpɔ̀cɔ̀kpɔ̀   (ideophone describing soft, "squushy" food)
      cɔ̀ɔ̀   (ideophone describing a liquid pouring out in a single
                       stream)

bh: bhàmbá'ò   'butterfly'   bhɔ́kè   'bucket'
      bhìní   'porcupine'   bhù   'gun'

dh: dhìdhí   'insect (generic)' dhó   'raft'
      dhìŋ   'shark'   dhùà   'cannon'

g: gàŋgàŋ   'sting ray'   gí'í   'round house'
      gé'é   'hawk'   gɔ́ŋgɔ̀   'grasshopper'

gb: gbàsà   'cassava'   gbó'ò   'oath'
      gbí   'all, every'   gbɔ́ɔ̀   'eggplant'

v: vànyá   'blood vessel'   vɔ̀ɔ̀vɔ̀ɔ̀   'lungs'
      vìlvíì   'windstorm'   vù   'mildew, mold'

z: zààmà   'gravel'   zìɔ̀   'ceiling mat'
      zíì   'tribe, kind'   zù'ú   '(carpenter's) nail'

h: hákètò   'forgive me'   hìí   'if'
      héé   (particle)   hɔ́ndɔ̀   'hundred'

ŋ: ŋàní   'character'

mb: mbê   'what?'   mbééì   'steamship'

nd: ndáfàí   'masked entertainer'
      ndòfógbɔ́í ~ ndòvógbɔ́í   'snake (sp.), brown'

nj: ᴿnjàfá   'report (someone) to a superior'

ŋg: ŋgèèmàgbìsà   'scorpion'
      ŋgɔ́ɔ̀   'older brother or sister'

Initial /y/, omitted from the discussion up to this point, seems in
one or two forms to be an inherited consonant, but is included here be-
cause of its extreme rarity. It is found in two clearly innovated
nouns, a variant form of one adverb, a conjunctive word, and a "rela-
tional particle" (see 6.7 below); /y/ occurs also beginning a deriva-

tional suffix, and as a derivative of the second person singular pronoun form /í/ before a vowel. The relevant forms are:

yááfí ~ yáávî   'masked dancer'

yàbásì   'onion' (a form /sìbáà/ is more common)

yὲ   'in that case (?)' (variant of /wὲ/ ?)

yɔ́   'like, resembling'

yὲ   'to, for'

1.3. Apart from what may or may not be known about the origin of individual stems with various initial consonants, there is a striking statistical contrast between the two categories of initial consonants, inherited and innovated. To be sure, four of the innovated consonants (all oral stops) are more common in initial position than the inherited /ny/, and one is more common than /n/. Oral stops are, however, typically more common than nasals in Vai. Comparing pairs of consonants with closer phonetic similarity, the inherited consonants are far more common than the innovated consonants. Taking all of the consonants together, in a vocabulary of some 1500 items, the inherited consonants appear stem-initially in 85%. The innovated consonants appear in 13½%. The remaining 1½% have initial vowels, and include only a few pronoun forms and a few words of Arabic and English origin.

Further details of these statistics may be even more revealing. The following is a composite chart of the Vai consonants (including also /ŋgb/, which has been recorded only intervocalically), in which the inherited consonants are indicated by asterisks; after each consonant is given the number of words (not all separate morphemes, to be sure, but nevertheless roughly representative) listed with that initial consonant:

p: 42	*t: 137	c: 5	*k: 268	*kp: 101
*b: 143		*j: 85		
bh: 18	dh: 25		g: 29	gb: 36
*f: 86	*s: 138		h: 8	
v: 12	z: 19			
*w: 62	*l: 121	y: 5		
*m: 69	*n: 39	*ny: 25	ŋ: 1	
mb: 2	nd: 2	nj: 1	ŋg: 2	ŋgb: 0

These statistics suggest some further observations concerning the in-

novated consonants. The commonest of them, /p, g, gb/, along with the
very rare /c/, fill out the two series of voiceless and voiced stops;
their innovation thus involved no introduction of new distinctive fea-
tures into the phonology. It is also highly probable that /p, g, gb/
are more common than sources of the other innovated consonants in lan-
guages with which Vai has had contact within the past five centuries;
the arrival of the Vai people at the coast, and thus contacts with Gola
in particular, as well as the earliest possible contacts with European
languages, all seem to date from approximately five hundred years ago.
The phonologic system in itself may have occasioned more resistance to
the introduction of /bh, dh, v, z/, and still more to /mb, nd, nj, ŋg/;
the latter in particular, along with /c, h, ŋ/, seem to be attributable
to relatively recent contacts, and may also lend support to the hypo-
thesis that prenasalized stops are a recent development in Mende-Bandi,
the incursion of which seems to have completed the geographical separa-
tion of Vai from Kono. Gola is the source of by far the largest number
of identifiably adopted lexical items in Vai, with Mende a rather poor
second.

It is natural to cross-cultural contacts, and typical of languages
in general, that adopted vocabulary is found predominantly in the mor-
phologic class of nouns (and, in the case of the Mande languages, spe-
cifically "free nouns"). Some languages, in fact, show a vigorous re-
sistance to innovation except in this category (cf. Welmers 1961). In
Vai, however, stems with initial innovated consonants include a fairly
large number of kinship terms, body parts, and verbs. As would be ex-
pected, however, free nouns are certainly predominant. Tradition has
it that the first Vai settlers along the coast were mostly male, en-
gaged in the military conquest of new territory with the purpose of
stabilizing the salt trade, and that they took wives and slaves from
neighboring tribes. To the extent that this may be true, it may well
account for some of the kinds of words that have come into Vai, parti-
cularly through bilingual children with complete native competence in
two phonologic systems. It by no means follows, however (as some indi-
viduals have suggested), that Vai is in any significant sense a "mixed
language." In spite of the fact that more than half of the stem-ini-
tial consonant phonemes, taken as a bare list, are of non-PNM origin,
the fact remains that even the phonology is preponderantly Northern

Mande in the language as a whole. The areas of vocabulary most essen-
tial to any language have been as relatively undisturbed in Vai as any-
one could expect, and the grammatical structure reveals no trace of
substantial non-Mande influence.

1.4. In intervocalic position, in stems or at least in minimal
forms that show no evidence of containing more than one morpheme, the
voiceless stops /t, k, kp/ are rare. The voiceless fricatives /f, s/,
while not quite so rare, are far from common. The following are a sub-
stantial number of the recorded examples:

^Rbátò	'glorify, worship'	^Rsɔ́ɔ́kò	'push through'
^Rkpátì	'adhere'	sàkpá	'three'
nítí	'leech'	síkpà	'hawk'
kàfà	'shoulder, wing'	kàsé	'fault, blame; rust'
kèèfè	'pepper'	kísí	'termites'
kpàfì	'tick'	^Rkpàsí	'beat, pummel'
lìfí	'night'	mùsú	'woman'

The voiced stops /b, j/, which are counted among the inherited con-
sonants of Vai in initial position, along with all of the innovated
stops and fricatives, are extremely rare in intervocalic position.
They are found only in words that are quite clearly adopted, most of
them rather recently. Examples are:

sìbáà	'onion'	làhádhì	'Sunday'
à'ìjímà	'Friday'	jégà	'jigger'
kápà	'cent'	^Rvúgbò	'flog'
cɔ́cì	'church'	kávù	'rattan (sp.)'

1.5. In intervocalic position, the nasal-oral sequences /mb, nd,
nj, ŋg, ŋgb/ have quite a different status from the very rare initial
sequences discussed in 1.2 above. First, they are fairly common. Se-
cond, apart from a very few adopted words, they are not clearly in con-
trast with voiced oral stops; this fact is reflected by alternate re-
presentations in the Vai syllabic writing system, which until about
1900 had no separate symbols for these nasal-oral sequences. In the
language as spoken today, however, it is hardly defensible to interpret
these nasal-oral sequences as simply allophones of oral stops; note the
contrastive oral stops in the forms for 'onion, Friday, jigger, flog'

in the examples just above. (The nasal-oral sequences are, however, clearly in contrast with simple nasals; see 1.7 below.) Third, the question may legitimately be raised as to whether these are to be interpreted as unit phonemes or as clusters. Two considerations favor treating them as clusters. In some occurrences, they appear to be the product of a process of reduplication of an oral stop (as in the first example of /mb/ below, and three of the four examples of /ŋgb/). Although there are also cases of reduplication with no consonantal alternation (e.g., /kpɔ́kpɔ́/ 'hammer'), there is clearly a pattern of reduplication with an inserted nasal, and with voicing of an unvoiced stop if applicable; this pattern was already noted by Koelle in 1850-51. Further, a number of occurrences of these phonetically nasal-oral sequences are clearly derived from a stem-final /ŋ/ followed by a stem-initial stop. No known cases are included in the examples below, but an illustration is /bàŋgú'ú/ 'base of a pissava palm branch', from /bàŋ/ 'piassava palm' and /kù'ú/ 'bottom, base'. On the other hand, there is no recognizable phonetic difference, and thus no phonemic contrast, between such morphemically divisible sequences and sequences which are clearly parts of indivisble stems (of which the forms for 'spoon, bird, iron, chief' are prime examples among the illustrations below). Further, there is no recognizable contrast between sequences which, from their derivation, might be expected to show a contrast. Forms such as /bòmbò/ 'smallpox' and /bhàmbá'ò/ 'butterfly, moth', though apparently reflecting a reduplication of contrastive consonants, /b/ and /bh/, have the same intervocalic /mb/. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that, although different derivations may have to be recognized at a deeper morphologic level of structure, there is only one set of nasal-oral sequences in the surface phonology, and whether they are labelled units or clusters is immaterial.[6] Examples are:

bòmbò	'smallpox'	bìndá	'spoon'
jàmbá	'leaf'	jèndà	'spindle'
ᴿjɛ́mbɛ́	'watch'	kòndé	'bird'
kámbá	'grave'	ᴿkpàndí	'become hot'
kámbí	'guinea fowl'	lɛ̀ndɛ́	'vehicle'
kúmbé'é	'knee'	kùndú	'iron'
sànjá	'town'	fàŋgà	'tension drum'

mànjá	'chief'	ᴿjàŋgátà	'punish'
kὲnjὶ	'nail, claw'	jòŋgà	'boasting'
kɔ̀njɛ́	'kernel, nut'	kὲŋgèè	'(not) until'
ᴿjànjáà	'lengthen'	kóngó	'bark (of tree)'
gbὲŋgbὲŋ	'bass drum'	kpéŋgbé	'frog'
ᴿkpáŋgbá	'fasten'	lɔ̀ŋgbɔ́	'crowd, flock'

1.6.   Before beginning this study of Vai, two problems in particular were widely and repeatedly singled out as knotty, frustrating, and perhaps insoluble. One was tone; for a description of the rather simple tonal system, see 3 below. The other was the mysterious and even capricious appearance and disappearance of [l] in particular, but other resonants and some nasals as well, in intervocalic position -- variations noted not only in comparing the speech of different individuals, but also in the speech of almost any single individual even from one moment to the next.[7] The problem of intervocalic [l] is indeed worthy of separate treatment, if only because of the vast number of forms involved; it is reserved for 1.8 below. In the case of the other sounds in question, an organization of the relevant forms in terms of their vowels shows some of the problems to be illusory, and the actual variations highly restricted.

It should be noted here that, although this analysis is based almost entirely on the speech of one individual, Fr. Kandakai is acutely aware of the variations that are found in Vai; he shows a considerable amount of unconscious variation in his own speech, and has noted it in listening to tape recordings of his own connected discourse. On his own initiative and also in response to questions that others have raised, he has been unusually observant about the variations in question. With probably very few exceptions, he seems to have reported all the forms in which variation appears.

The simplest case to begin with is /y/, which is rare from any viewpoint. It appears in a very few stems such as /bòyà/ 'beard' and /jááyá/ 'mangrove', and also in a rather uncommon derivational suffix, as in /kò'òyáà/ 'honor, respect', from /ᴿkò'ó/ 'be large'. It also appears in a common relational particle with dative or applicative meaning, as in /í ì mà à yè/ 'do it for him.' There is no issue in these

cases; the /y/ is always present as [y], and cannot be omitted. Cases
which have been considered questionable are a very few like those here
interpreted as /ᴿlíâ/ 'like, enjoy, love' and /nîɛ̂/ 'here'. In such
sequences, there is no problem of an intervocalic /y/ being sometimes
present and sometimes absent. There appears to be no appreciable vari-
ation in the phonetic transition from the first to the second vowel, or
at most there may be more variation in the learner's hearing than in
the speaker's pronunciation. The question (which has arisen in early
work on countless other languages as well) is simply whether to recog-
nize the transition as a /y/ or as nothing. In such sequences of /i/
followed by another vowel, there is no audible or visible movement from
the tongue position of /i/ to a higher tongue position before the fol-
lowing vowel, and thus no good reason to recognize an intervocalic /y/
in the structure. Further, such sequences are actually in contrast
with one which includes an audible /y/ (though after a word space in
the transcription), with the relational particle referred to above:
/í yè/ 'to you, for you'.

       The situation in the case of /w/ is somewhat more complicated, but
begins with sets of forms quite comparable to those involving /y/. The
first set consists of forms which do not contain a rounded vowel. In-
tervocalic /w/ (phonetically [ʋ] before /i, e, ɛ/, as in initial posi-
tion) appears to predominate in the pronunciation of these forms. In
the last of the following examples, however, the omission of /w/ has
been reported (Charles Hutchison, personal communication); it is possi-
ble that the /w/ is optional in other forms as well, perhaps in all
two-syllable forms. The inclusion of /w/ in a practical orthography
is almost certainly the wisest choice:

báwà	'surfboat'	léwé'é	'itchy blotches'
sàwà	'law'	tɛ́wɛ̀	'black duiker'
lààwí'à	'sling'	péwé	'mongoose'

       Second, on the other hand, there is no discernable [w], which should
be visible as a slight increase in lip rounding before the following
vowel, between a rounded and an unrounded vowel in forms like the fol-
lowing:

gbóà	'moronic'	lúà	'ink'
lóà	'hernia'	ᴿsúà	'greet'

Crucially important for the analysis of forms of this type is the one
word for 'animal, meat', here interpreted as /sùέ/, plus innumerable
cases of nouns with stem-final /u/ followed by the definite suffix in
the form /ě/. In this environment, /u/ is a front rounded vowel, [ü],
and has even been reported to "become /i/," an extreme which I have not
heard. Transcriptions (apart from tone) such as *suyɛ* or *suiɛ* have been
proposed for 'animal', not only by non-Vai speakers attempting to ana-
lyze the language, but even by native speakers who, perhaps because of
experience with other languages, recognize the phonetic details. What
is significant at this point is that there is not the remotest possibi-
lity of interpreting such sequences of rounded plus unrounded vowel as
including an intervocalic /w/; nor is there any need, of course, to re-
present the fronting of /u/ before /ɛ/ in any way.

A third category of forms involves the opposite type of transition,
from an unrounded to a rounded vowel, plus one case of a transition
from a lower to a higher rounded vowel. Again, no [w] in the form of a
transitional lip rounding and release is heard in the following, which
include only short vowels:

ᴿbóù	'move (residence)'	kèú	'tortoise'
fὲó	'asthma'	kèù	'dream'
jέù	'trick'	ᴿláó	'agree, permit'

In a fourth category of forms, a problem begins to appear; in each
of these, the vowel after the initial consonant is long. In the first
of the examples below, pronunciations with and without an intervocalic
/w/ are reported to be equally acceptable. In the second, the omission
of /w/ would not be surprising, though it has not been noted. In the
third and fourth, the omission of /w/ would undoubtedly result in the
reduction of the sequence to a double vowel, and there is no evidence
for such alternative forms. In any case, no contrasts are involved,
and the following can readily be analyzed as structurally including /w/:

kààwɔ̀	'crab'
kpààwɔ̀	'forked stick used for adze handle'
ᴿlúúwù	'treat by inhalation of medicated stem'
lúúwú	'women's tribal cicatrices'

Finally, there is a very small number of forms in which there is a

real and common alternation between the presence and absence of inter-
vocalic /w/, such that the alternate forms must be recognized as having
significantly different phonologic structures. For example, the word
for 'sodium' (generally 'salt', but also applicable to lye and baking
soda) may be either /kɔwɔ́/ or /kɔ́ɔ́/. This alternation in the segmental
phonemes is in contrast with an invariable sequence in /^{R}kɔ́ɔ́/ 'gather
up (small things)', and also with a different alternation in /kɔ'ɔ́/
([kɔ̀lɔ́] or [kɔ̀ɔ́]) 'rice'. With intervocalic elision in both cases,
however, 'sodium' and 'rice' are homophonous; the confusion most likely
to result from this homophony, between 'salt' and 'rice', may be avoi-
ded by using for 'salt' the common compound /kpɔ̀ndɔ̀-kɔ́ɔ́/ (or /kpɔ̀ndɔ̀-
kɔ̀wɔ́/), in which /kpɔ̀ndɔ̀/ is "soup" (anything served on rice). Only
four cases of this type have been recorded; in three of them, there are
two identical short rounded vowels if /w/ is present. The cases are:

  jɔ̀wɔ́ ~ jɔ̀ɔ́ 'sweet potato'   kɔ̀wɔ́ ~ kɔ̀ɔ́ 'sodium'
  jɔ̀wɔ́ ~ jɔ̀ɔ́ 'chain'   kàwɔ́ ~ kàɔ́ 'encrusted food'

From a purely descriptive point of view, it is sufficient, of course,
simply to note the existence of an alternation such as this, and its
fairly systematic restriction to a particular type of form. Histori-
cally, /w/ is apparently in the process of being lost (not appearing)
in these forms, though Koelle noted both forms for 'sweet potato' as
long ago as 1850-51. It is also relevant, however, to consider the
practical problem of how to write such forms in an alphabetic orthogra-
phy which may be used for everyday written communication and in publi-
cations. A final solution should ideally be based on a statistical and
a sociolinguistic investigation which would require a study far more
extensive than the present one (cf. 1.8 below). Tentatively, the sa-
fest procedure is probably to write these forms with *w* for purposes of
publication, while of course recognizing the privilege of any individu-
al to omit the *w* if he prefers.

1.7. Among the intervocalic nasals, /m/ presents no known problem
at all. It appears invariably, and fairly commonly, in forms of which
the following are typical:

  fúmú   'powder'   kímá   'cold'
  kàmá   'elephant'   kèmú   'hard charcoal'

kúmú   'bee, honey'   lòmá   'shirt'

Intervocalic /n/ presents no systematic problem. It is invariable in most of its occurrences; e.g.,

bíná	'horn'	káná	'iguana'
bònà	'larynx'	^Rkóná	'be bitter'
bhìní	'porcupine'	náánì	'four'

In one known case, however, there is an alternation between the presence and absence of intervocalic /n/: both /mánì/ and /mâì/ occur in the meaning 'skin, body, vicinity, proximity' (for which Koelle recorded only *mani*). At present, the best information available is that /mâì/ is by far the commoner form, and is probably to be preferred for use in a practical orthography. The suggestion has been made that the nasalization of the vowels be indicated; this is unnecessary, since vowels are automatically nasalized after a nasal consonant, and apart from tone the form is like the invariable /^Rmàí/ 'insult'.

Intervocalic /ny/ is invariable in most environments. A systematic but highly restricted exception will be discussed after listing the following examples:

^Rfànyá	'be heavy'	mányà'é	'cat'
fónyɔ́	'piassava fibers'	míínyá	'python'
gbànyà	'tongs, pliers'	^Rmììnyá	'be afraid'
kànyà	'wax'	wɔ́nyɛ̀	'driver ants'
kɛ̀nyɛ́	'sand'	kúnyɛ̀	'odor'

In four recorded forms, there is a variation between [ny], [ỹ], and nothing. In all of these, the first vowel is a single or short /i/; this restriction excludes the forms for 'python' and 'be afraid' above. Whether the initial nasal /m/ or the identity of the final vowel is also significant for this pattern of variation cannot be determined; there are no relevant forms to justify or exclude a broader generalization. Considering [ỹ] to be an optional allophone of /ny/, the phonemic variants are:

mínyá ~ míá	'where?'	^Rmínyà ~ ^Rmíà	'stay long'
mínyà ~ míà	'which?'	mìnyɛ́ ~ mìɛ́	'knife'

In the case of 'knife', I have recorded /ny/ more frequently than no

intervocalic consonant (though it is possible that, having heard /mìnyɛ́/
first, I sometimes used the same transcription later even when /mìɛ́/
was said); in the other cases, I would not have been aware of the vari-
ants with /ny/ except that Fr. Kandakai mentioned them on one occasion.
Whether /ny/ in 'knife' is actually more common (possibly because of
the tones or the identity of the following vowel) cannot be determined
at present. There are no contrasts, however, which would make the
omission of /ny/ in a practical orthography confusing, and omitting it
is probably to be preferred.

There is one recorded case of a free variation between intervocalic
/ny/ and /ŋ/: /sínyáŋ/ or /síŋáŋ/ 'cutlass (of indigenous type and lo-
cal manufacture)'.

Intervocalic /ŋ/ is invariable in two other recorded cases, in which
the preceding and following vowels are different:

| [R]síŋà | 'lend to' | sòŋá | 'jaundice' |

Between identical vowels, however, /ŋ/ is said to be heard sometimes in
a number of forms, but variants without /ŋ/ and with long nasalized vo-
wels are apparently far more common. Only the low vowels /ɛ, a, ɔ/ are
attested in forms of this type. This variation apparently reflects an
almost completed process of losing intervocalic /ŋ/ between identical
vowels; Koelle recorded only forms with /ŋ/ in 1850-51. About half of
the recorded cases are:

bàá ~ bàŋá	'reed instrument'	kɔ́ɔ́ ~ kɔ́ŋɔ́	'hunger'
gɛ̀ɛ́ ~ gɛ̀ŋɛ́	'saw'	kpàà ~ kpàŋà	'slat mat'
kàá ~ kàŋá	'box'	[R]láá ~ láŋá	'stop'
kɔ̀ɔ́ ~ kɔ̀ŋɔ́	'hill'	sɔ̀ɔ́ ~ sɔ̀ŋɔ́	'price, value'

For such forms, the variants with long nasalized vowels are probably to
be preferred for a modern alphabetic orthography. Three forms with in-
variable long nasalized vowels are also known, but they would not in-
troduce any confusion; in two of these, the vowel is /i/, which does
not occur in forms like those above:

hìí	'if'
kíì	'checkers' (Engl. *king*)
wɛ́ɛ́	'with determination'

1.8. In a very few (but some of them exceedingly common) morphemes,

apparently none of which can occur in utterance-initial position, a
morpheme-initial [l] is sometimes heard if the preceding morpheme ends
with a vowel; a morpheme-final /ŋ/ followed by one of these morphemes
always results in the sequence /nd/. This occasional and often elided
[l] cannot be assigned to the initial consonant phoneme interpreted as
/l/ in 1.1 above; the common initial /l/ is pronounced as [ɗ] by some
speakers, but the initial consonant of the morphemes in question here,
if pronounced at all, is invariably [l], and in contrast with /l/.[8]
There are two reasons for not having treated this [l] in connection
with initial consonants: first, the morphemes in which it may appear
are not "words" which can normally be cited independently (though some
of them will be written as separate words); and second, it has the same
phonologic status, after a morpheme-final vowel, as morpheme-internal
intervocalic [l], also commonly elided, which is the primary topic of
this section. Like the morpheme-internal alternation between [l] and
nothing, this comparable alternation will be written with an apostrophe
(see below). In Klingenheben's unpublished vocabularly file of Vai,
there are some twenty-six forms with initial [l] as opposed to [ɗ] (the
entries were kindly made available to me by Mrs. Gail Stewart, personal
communication); almost all of those not included in the list below are
derivatives of one or another of these, most of which I would write as
phrases, and none of which seems to weaken the analysis proposed here.
The morphemes in which I have recorded this alternation are:

'ɔ́	(introduces direct quotations)
'ɔ́	'only' (a more emphatic form, using the same mor- pheme initially and finally, is /'ɔ́béndɔ́/)
'ɔ̀	'inside' (a relational noun)
'à	(a relational particle expressing association)
'à	(a verbal construction marker; see 10 below)
'à	(a verbal suffix; see 10 below)
'éè	(a verbal suffix; see 10 below)

In perhaps as many as forty percent of all Vai stems, an intervoca-
lic [l] is sometimes heard, in the speech of some people. In most if
not all such forms, variants without [l] are said to be more common.
No single word can be cited as having an invariable intervocalic [l].
This is clearly another instance of a phonetic change well on its way

to completion, but not yet fully realized -- a phenomenon one is not
often privileged to observe, particularly in such a conspicuous and ex-
tensive form.   In 1850-51, Koelle transcribed a great many of the rele-
vant forms, and wrote them consistently with *r*, mentioning only a few
sporadic instances of its elision.[9]   At present, Fr. Kandakai has of-
fered the "guestimate" that [1] may be heard from twenty to thirty per-
cent of the time in some words, and up to perhaps fifty percent of the
time in others.   I would judge, after listening to an hour or two of
rather animated conversation among four men approximately in their fif-
ties, that [1] is far less common, in fact quite rare, at least in that
style of speech.   The extent to which [1] has been lost does not corre-
late with dialect areas, nor entirely with age groups, though in gene-
ral, as would be expected, it is heard more commonly in the speech of
the older generation.   Really adequate information on this could hardly
have been obtained for the present study even if a great deal more time
had been available; it would be a major research project in its own
right, requiring an extensive recording of the speech of scores or even
hundreds of people, and including a careful study of stylistic and
sociolinguistic factors.   At the same time, some reasonably intelligent
observations can be made even with the limited evidence available,
which can at least serve as guidelines for possible further investiga-
tion of the topic.

Before further comments are offered, however, a statement is in or-
der as to how this alternation should be treated in a descriptive study
such as this, as well as for purposes of a practical alphabetic ortho-
graphy of Vai.   From the viewpoint of a technical description, it does
not seem appropriate to omit in a transcription what is sometimes heard
in speech; yet it seems unfortunate to suggest, by writing *l* in every
instance where it may sometimes or occasionally be heard, that it has
the same status as any other phoneme.   And it would, of course, be
hopelessly redundant and uneconomical to write two alternate forms for
every one of the hundreds of instances that must be cited.   In efforts
to decide on a practical orthography (which is, of course, by no means
an unrelated problem), countless fruitless hours are said to have been
spent in discussing whether the optional intervocalic [1] should always
be written, always omitted, or written in some words but not in others.

Some experiments have been conducted, using the extremes of "always" and "never," and neither seems acceptable. Some readers are understandably impatient at seeing the written language constantly interrupted by the letter *l* where they do not normally pronounce the sound it is supposed to represent; others are, equally understandably, confused if *l* is omitted in writing all such words, since they often pronounce such words with [l], and would like to depend on the letter to help them recognize the word. The solution adopted for this study, and recommended for a practical orthography, had apparently never occurred to anyone before, but was the instant reaction of Beatrice F. Welmers when the problem was described to her (and for which she deserves full credit if it should be immortalized in Vai publications): use an apostrophe. In this description, /'/ is simply defined as representing the alternation in question. In practical use, since many potential readers of Vai are already at least minimally literate in English, and since an apostrophe is a less conspicuous symbol than the other letters that will be used, it should not be difficult to teach people to ignore it or to pronounce it as [l], as they prefer. Such a compromise at least seems far preferable to never writing Vai alphabetically at all, which was beginning to seem inevitable.

A few typical examples -- all of which have been heard both with and without [l] when the particular form in question did not seem to be the focus of attention -- are as follows:

ᴿkì'í	'tie'	kí'à	'path, road'
té'é	'sun, day'	ᴿbè'á	'fall'
ᴿsɛ̀'ɛ́	'go up'	tɛ́'ì	'proverb'
fà'á	'liver'	sá'é	'lying down'
kɔ̀'ɔ́	'rice'	kɔ̀'í	'the ocean'
kpò'ó	'skin; paper, book'	bó'í	'medicine'
tú'ú	'oil'	kú'ɛ̀	'sound, voice'
kùmà'é	'palm nuts'	kúmbé'é	'knee'
fàà'é	'dead'	bɛ̀'ɛsíí	'honor, praise'
kà'àmɔ́ɔ́	'teacher'	mù'ì'é	'overturned'

One may well wonder whether the elision of intervocalic [l] is actually equally optional in all cases in a phrase such as /bó'í ló'á'é/ 'sour medicine'. Under the circumstances of this study, all that could

be done was to try to ascertain whether all possible combinations would
be acceptable; the possibilities are:

[bóí lóáé]   [bólí lóláé]

[bólí lóáé]   [bólí lóálé]

[bóí lóláé]   [bóí lólálé]

[bóí lóálé]   [bólí lólálé]

None of the alternatives seemed particularly unacceptable to Fr. Kanda-
kai, though it was hardly possible to tell (or undoubtedly for him to
judge in the admittedly artificial context) whether some sounded more
"natural" than others. Such premature and rather intuitive feelings as
I may have concerning the relative probability of hearing one or ano-
ther of the above are hardly worth mentioning.

    Some other matters, however, are well worth discussing. The first
is a sociolinguistic problem. It appears to be a rather widely accep-
ted popular belief that the existence of a written form of a language
has a strong tendency to inhibit language change. Although the influ-
ence of a written language cannot be totally ignored (as exemplified by
"spelling pronunciations," of which my own English [palm] for the more
common [pa:m] may be an excellent example), it is far more significant
that even the alltime best seller in English literature has not preven-
ted speakers of English from losing the older forms 'thou, thee, thy,
thine' except, for some of us, in addressing God in prayer. In the
case of Vai, the syllabic writing system, probably familiar to a far
smaller percentage of the speakers of the language than even Elizabe-
than English is to modern speakers of English, might be expected to
have exerted even less influence on the contemporary spoken language.
One must not, however, discount the impact of a number of deeply re-
spected elders, conversant with and understandably proud of the unique
Vai syllabary, or perhaps merely retaining the vanishing intervocalic
[l] in their own speech, on the younger generation. It is to be expec-
ted, in this rather typical West African society, that almost any
youngster, for all the innovating contacts he may have, would still be
aware that the word for 'crocodile', which he normally pronounces as
[fàí], is properly [fàlí] in the tradition of the elders of his people.
This is but one of the reasons why it seems appropriate to recognize
the generally archaic intervocalic [l] as a reality in modern Vai

structure.

Closely related to this is a stylistic problem. For those who are
aware of the archaic forms, it is natural that intervocalic [l] is far
more likely to be used in isolated citation forms than in connected
discourse. In the nature of the present study, citation forms or at
least only minimal sentences have tended to predominate, although ef-
forts have been made to hear representative forms in as natural con-
texts as possible. It is also a virtual certainty that intervocalic
[l] will be used more commonly in speaking to an expatriate learner of
the language than in informal conversation with one's peers. (Much of
the desired recording for a fuller study should be done by native spea-
kers of Vai, if possible without the interviewees being aware in ad-
vance that their speech is being recorded.) Further, it is likely that
intervocalic [l] is heard more frequently in formal address than in ca-
sual conversation, and by the same token in words with something of a
formal connotation, such as /bɛ̀'ɛsíí/ 'praise, honor, respect' as op-
posed to /kùmà'é/ 'palm nuts'. This may be one of the reasons why [l]
is said to be heard more frequently in some words than in others.

In discussing the elision of other intervocalic consonants (1.6,7
above), it was noted that elision was in every case restricted to forms
with particular segmental shapes. While the same may have been true
for [l] when it first began to be elided, the elision seems at present
to have spread to all forms irrespective of such possible conditioning
factors. It is attested even in a number of forms like /tàà'à/ 'gill',
/tòò'ò/ 'kola nut', and /kèè'é/ 'snail', though in these cases, since
three consecutive identical vowels are not permitted (except in ideo-
phones), at least with the same tones, the forms with elision are [tàà],
[tòò], and [kèé] ([kèě]?) or perhaps [kèéé]. It is nevertheless possi-
ble that pronunciations with [l] are more common in the case of words
with definable segmental or possibly tonal characteristics.

Finally, it is possible that [l] is commonly heard in a few words of
rather recent foreign origin, particularly if the foreign source word
is widely known; and in some such forms it may eventually be retained,
and at some later date recognized as an innovation in the phonologic
system. Cases of this type include /pù'ɔ̀ŋ/ 'mango' (Liberian English
'plum') and /sé'èŋ/ 'twenty cents' (for which 'shilling' is still used
fairly commonly in Liberian English). In the latter case, however, I

have casually slipped phrases like /sé'èŋ fè'á/ 'forty cents' into lon-
ger sentences without using intervocalic [1], and have not noted a sign
of surprise or disapproval. As of even date, however, I would be ra-
ther surprised to hear [téélà] 'tailor' without an intervocalic [1]; I
suspect that it is still a conscious citation of a foreign word, a con-
venient and perhaps somewhat prestigious substitute for the Vai phrase
/kò'à só'ó-mɔ̀ɔ̀/ (literally 'cloth sew-person').

In short, it does not appear that any systematic criteria are likely
to be found for recognizing intervocalic [1] as more desirable or ac-
ceptable in some words than in others, though there may be a range in
the frequency of its occurrence in some individual forms as opposed to
others. Further, it appears that, although intervocalic [1] is proba-
bly destined for eventual oblivion (perhaps later to reappear, as a
sort of phonetic phoenix, in newly adopted words), it is likely to be
recognized, heard, and even emotionally defended for at least a few
more decades. In a later generation, when no one remains to use it or
demand it, our ubiquitous apostrophe can also be dispensed with.

1.9.   Only one consonant, /ŋ/, occurs in word-final position.
Phrase-medially, this sometimes -- perhaps generally, but by no means
always in the relatively careful speech I have primarily heard -- be-
comes [m] or [n] (or [ɳ] or [ŋm]) by assimilation to the articulatory
position of the initial consonant of the following word. In some other
languages, I have frequently found it difficult to recognize contrasts
between /i/ and /e/, or between /u/ and /o/, in closed syllables, and
especially before /ŋ/. In Vai, this has presented no problem. The
seven vowels (see 2 below) are clearly distinct in the following mono-
syllables, which otherwise differ only in tone in a few cases:

lîŋ	'ring'	[R]lúŋ	'hurt'
léŋ	'child'	[R]lŏŋ	'enter'
[R]lɛ́ŋ	'hang up'	[R]lɔ́ŋ	'eat'
	[R]láŋ	'hear'	

CHAPTER 2
VOWELS

2.1. Vai has seven oral vowel phonemes. Nasalized counterparts of four of these have been recorded, though they are not frequent. These are as follows:

i	u	ĩ	
e	o		
ɛ	ɔ	ɛ̃	ɔ̃
	a		ã

2.2. All vowels may occur short (written singly) or long (written doubly). Structurally long vowels are, of course, exceedingly common if intervocalic [1] is not pronounced in forms like /túʼú/ 'oil'; the examples in 1.8 above only begin to hint at the extent of this phenomenon. There are also instances of long vowels, however, where there is no evidence of an optionally or recently elided intervocalic consonant (although at least the word for 'cow', cited below, has apparent cognates in other Mande languages with an intervocalic consonant). Illustrations of the oral vowels, short and long, are:

kǐ	'sleeping'	nìí	'cow'
kèfé	'pineapple'	kèèfè	'pepper'
sɛ̀nɛ́	'farm'	fɛ̀ɛ̀wɛ̂	'winnowing basket'
tá	'fire'	ᴿtáá	'go'
sɔ̌	'work'	sɔ́ɔ̀	'firewood'
kó	'thing (matter)'	sóó	'hole'
bhù	'gun'	kùú	'compound, home'

Abnormally lengthened vowels are characteristic of some ideophonic forms. These are indicated by triple writing of the vowel in forms such as the following:

wùùù   (descriptive of movement in mass or confusion)

wàáà   (descriptive of rain falling in a brief shower)

dhùúù   (descriptive of the sound of a gun or cannon)

There are undoubtedly a great many more forms like these; the circum-
stances under which the present study was made were naturally not con-
ducive to hearing many of them used.

It may also be necessary to recognize structurally triple vowels
where /'/ is not realized as [l], and where the tones of the three vo-
wels are not identical. It is also possible, however, that these se-
quences are reduced to ordinary long or double vowels, although the
tone sequences are retained. Examples of forms of this type are:

kèè'é   'snail'   pòó'ò   'fruit (sp.)'

jèè'é   'rough'   tóó'ò   'fruit (sp.)'

ténjè'ěě   'the plate'   à táá'à   'he has gone'

2.3.   There are also numerous instances of sequences of two diffe-
rent vowels in stems; again, these are multiplied if /'/ is not rea-
lized as [l], as in /fà'í/ 'crocodile'. Apart from such elision, se-
quences of three vowels, at least two of them different, are not recor-
ded in stems. Such sequences are common, however, in forms in which
two stem-final vowels are followed by a suffix consisting of a vowel.
In sentences, up to five consecutive vowels have been recorded. Exam-
ples of vowel sequences are as follows; in the full sentence, spaces
written between words are not necessarily phonologically significant:

kàí   'man'   kàíě   'the man'

tlè   'chicken'   tlèě   'the chicken'

lòà   'red monkey'   nlíě   'the cow'

kèú   'tortoise'   kèúě   'the tortoise'

     kàíě ì à nyìà sémbé 'à   'the man fixes it well'

2.4.   Phonemically nasalized vowels are not at all common, and are
clearly not part of the inherited phonology of Vai, which, however,
displays a structural counterpart in stem-final /ŋ/ (1.9 above). Long
nasalized vowels in alternates of forms with intervocalic /ŋ/, and in a
few other forms, have already been described and illustrated in 1.7
above. Apart from these, fewer than twenty forms with nasalized vowels
have been recorded. Small though this number is, the forms neverthe-
less fall into definably different groups. First are two forms with

single nasalized vowels, and two with two different vowels both of
which are nasalized:

kpà̰   'credit' (owed to,   pɔ̀wá̰   'rice mixed with
         not by, the possessor)   greens or okra'
kpá̰   'firmly'   pá̰ḭ̀   'pint'

In six cases including a higher vowel followed by a lower vowel,
only the final lower vowel is prominently nasalized:

zḭ̀ɔ̰̀   'ceiling mat'   ló̰á̰   'tree (sp.)'
tó̰á̰   'bat'   kpὲsḭ́ɛ̰̀   'strangler fig'
tò̰á̰   'smithy'   jààsḭ́ɛ̰̀   'mushroom (sp.)'

In four cases, only the first part of a stem, with a long vowel, is
nasalized; one case of reduplication is included:

kpá̰à̰kὲsḭ̀   'wasp'
pá̰à̰píí   'stew made with starchy foods other than rice'
ᴿkpɛ̰́ɛ̰́sḭ̀   'remove (palm nuts from among thorns of cluster)'
tɛ̰̀ɛ̰́fìtɛ̰̀ɛ̰̀fì 'tough but resilient' (literal and metaphoric)

Finally, four reduplicated forms have been recorded, with long nasa-
lized vowels or vowel sequences in both parts; three of these are terms
for species of birds:

gɔ̰̀ɔ̰́gɔ̰̀ɔ̰́   'crow'   vɔ̰̀ɔ̰̀vɔ̰̀ɔ̰̀   'hornbill'
hḭ́ḭ̀hḭ̀ḭ̀   'owl'   dhɛ̰́ḭ́dhɛ̰̀ḭ̀   'epilepsy'

2.5. The absence of a nasalized counterpart of /u/ from the inven-
tory of nasalized vowels is probably not the result of a phonologic
constraint, but rather merely a reflection of the infrequency of nasa-
lized vowels in general. There is excellent evidence, however, that
the non-occurrence of nasalized counterparts of /e/ and /o/ is no acci-
dent. The same kind of vowel system -- seven oral vowels and five na-
salized vowels, with no nasal counterparts for /e/ and /o/ -- is excee-
dingly common in West Africa (Welmers 1973, p. 32). Since all of the
forms cited above are probably adopted from other languages (or perhaps
in some cases, of ideophonic types, native Vai inventions), the reper-
toire of nasalized vowels must reflect the phonology of a language or
languages with which Vai has been in contact relatively recently.

Further, after nasal consonants, the vowels /i, ɛ, a, ɔ, u/ are au-

tomatically nasalized (and not specially marked as such in this study).
Precisely after nasal consonants, /e/ and /o/ do not occur. It seems
clear that the contrast between intervocalic nasal-oral sequences and
oral stops is of rather recent origin in the history of Vai; so also is
the contrast between initial nasal-oral sequences and nasal consonants.
The contrast in initial position seems to have arisen with the intro-
duction of forms such as /ŋgɔ̂ɔ/ 'older brother or sister' from Mende.[10]
In the following forms, the oral release of /mb, nd, ŋg/ is not at all
prominent, but it is audible, and this interpretation is clearly pre-
ferred by native speakers of Vai:

mbê	'what?'	lùmbó'ò	'citrus fruit'
mbéél	'steamship'	sééndé	'rain water'
lìàmbò	'conversation'	ŋgèèmàgbìsà	'scorpion'

As suggested in 1.2 above, the first two of the above examples have
nothing to do with the common occurrence of syllabic [m̀] followed by a
stem-initial /b/; cf. 3.7 below.

TONES

3.1. Vai is a discrete-level tone language with two tones.[11]
Throughout a phrase or sentence, there is no appreciable downdrift con-
ditioned by a low tone between two high tones. A final high tone or
sequence of highs after low may be somewhat lowered (which is not down-
drift but rather an utterance-final "downtilt"; see 4.1 below), but
even this phenomenon has been less noticeable than in some other lan-
guages. In the following sentences, for example, there are respective-
ly four and five instances of one or more low tones between high tones.
Except for the final high tone in the first sentence, the last high in
each sentence is scarcely lower than the first, and certainly by no
means as low as any low tone in the sentence:

ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ ànú'à kɔ̀'ɔ́ mɛ̀nú sàŋ kàà mú.

   'I don't know where they bought that rice.'

mùsú sàkpá bɛ̀ kɔ̀'ɔ́ 'ɔ̀ fɛ̀-nà kéŋɛ̌ kpáà 'ɔ̀.

   'Three women are winnowing rice behind the house.'

3.2. A single vowel or syllabic nasal may have a single tone, as
may be noted in most of the forms so far cited. In such cases, high is
marked /'/ and low is marked /`/. In forms with two syllables or two
immediately successive vowels, any possible sequence of the two tones
may occur: high-high, low-low, high-low, low-high. The following
groups of examples may also serve as useful drill material for a lear-
ner of Vai, or to help a native speaker recognize the tones of his lan-
guage and learn how to represent them in writing:

sánjá	'fence'	gbàsà	'cassava'
wúnú	'mortar'	jɛ̀ndà	'spindle'
nyíɛ́	'fish'	kpɛ̀nɛ̀	'catfish'
té'é	'sun, day'	kpɔ̀'ɔ̀	'palm cabbage'
kúú	'bath fence'	làà	'paddle'

sámbà	'basket'	sànjá	'town'
kpɛ́sɛ̀	'toothbrush'	fàndé	'cotton, thread'
níɛ̀	'here'	sàkpá	'three'
kú'ɛ̀	'sound, voice'	jàmbá	'leaf'
búù	'man's bag'	làá	'clay pot'

3.3. Single short syllables, whether complete words in themselves
or parts of longer words, fall into the same four tonal groups. In
such syllables, a simple high or low tone is marked as illustrated
above. It is also possible, however, for the sequence high-low to be
compressed, as it were, into a quick falling tone accompanying a single
short vowel, and similarly for the sequence low-high to be compressed
into a quick rising tone. To mark such compressed sequences, the sym-
bols for marking tone are also compressed. Thus, for high-low, the
symbols /ˊˋ/ are joined to form /ˆ/; similarly, for low-high, the sym-
bols /ˋˊ/ are joined to form /ˇ/. Examples of tones with short vowels
are:

tá	'fire'	bhù	'gun'
jí	'water'	nà	'Come!'
kéŋ	'house'	lòŋ	'Come in!'
bâ	'mother'	mɔ̌	'person'
tîŋ	'island'	sɔ̌	'beans'
tâŋ	'ten'	bǎ	'goat'

The compressed sequences /ˆ/ and /ˇ/ with short vowels are not at
all common in word stems. The latter, however, always accompanies the
definite suffix of nouns, generally corresponding to English 'the'.
The suffix has the alternate forms /-ɛ̌/ (after /i, ɛ, u, ɔ, ŋ/), /-ě/
(after /e, o/), and /-ǎ/ (after /a/). If a word has more than one vo-
wel, and if the final vowel is one of these, with low-high tone, it is
always the definite suffix. A few representative examples are:

lìndíɛ̌	'the termite hill'	tîŋɛ̌	'the island'
jíɛ̌	'the water'	kéŋɛ̌	'the house'
nyíɛ́ɛ̌	'the fish'	fàndéɛ̌	'the cotton'
kùndúɛ̌	'the iron'	bòndòɛ̌	'the attic'
bhùɛ̌	'the gun'	sánjáǎ	'the town'
kpɔ̀'ɔ̌ɛ̌	'the palm cabbage'	bǎǎ	'the goat'

Where the compressed sequence /^/ might be expected, in a few com-
pounds and in alternate forms of certain suffixes, what appears is ra-
ther a double vowel with an ordinary high-low sequence. E.g.,

jàmbà-mɔ́ɔ̀   'herbalist' (from /jàmbá/ 'leaf' and /mɔ̌/ 'person')
à bɛ̀ kɔ̌ŋ tìɛ̀-náà   'he is cutting sticks' (cf. /^Rtìɛ́/ 'cut', suffix
                        form /-nà/ in other tonal contexts)

3.4. It has been mentioned in other connections (1.8 and 2.2 above)
that sequences of three identical vowels are not ordinarily permitted.
This certainly applies to forms in which the definite suffix would
otherwise be the third of three identical vowels, even though all three
would not have the same tone. The resultant contractions of vowels and
tones are illustrated in the following, which hardly seem to require a
separate statement of formal rules:

láá	'a plankfish'	:	láǎ	'the plankfish'
làà	'a paddle'	:	làǎ	'the paddle
làá	'a clay pot'	:	lǎǎ	'the clay pot'

If not all of these contrasts are consistently maintained in rapid
speech, it matters little to the structural analysis of the language,
or for purposes of a practical orthography. Among the six items above,
which were checked on one occasion with three speakers of Vai together,
the only confusion that was suggested as at all possible was between
/làá/ 'a clay pot' and /làǎ/ 'the paddle'; all agreed that the ortho-
graphic distinction was useful for its obvious reflection of at least
the underlying structures of the forms.

3.5. In spite of the existence of a few sets like the above, pairs
or larger groups of stems that differ from each other only in tone are
not particularly common, especially within a single grammatical cate-
gory; it would probably be possible to find a few dozen minimal pairs,
but hardly several score. As the above examples suggest, however, mi-
nimal pairs are multiplied when forms including the definite suffix are
taken into consideration. Pairs of forms that differ in both tone and
vowel length are even more common, as /sànjá/ 'a town' and /sànjáǎ/
'the town'. In context, the tonal difference between such forms is at
least as conspicuous as the difference in vowel length.

Although all four possible tone sequences are illustrated in 3.2 and

3.3 above, low-low (or a single low) is less common than the others as
a lexical tone pattern, and does not occur at all as a lexical tone
with verb stems. In nouns, low(-low) may well be confined to innovated
forms and a few monosyllabic relational nouns or particles (compare the
situation in Kpelle, Welmers 1961). In verb stems, there are few if
any pairs distinguished only by lexical tone; all verbs, however, ap-
pear with low replacing the lexical tone in a number of constructions.
There are also other differences (construction markers and/or suffixes)
which contribute to distinguishing different verbal constructions; yet
the tone of a verb stem is by no means a matter of indifference, but is
as important as anything else in the construction. In the imperative,
for example, all verbs with one known exception have low tone. Impera-
tives of three verbs are illustrated in the following:

      mú kùnὲ   'wake us up'

      kɔ̌ŋ tìὲ   'cut sticks'

      kɔ̌ŋɛ̌ lὲsì   'catch the stick'

Yet these same three verbs have different lexical tones, as shown in a
future construction:

      àì mú kúnέ'à   'he will wake us up'

      àì kɔ̌ŋ tìέ'à   'he will cut sticks'

      àì kɔ̌ŋɛ̌ lέsì'à   'he will catch the stick'

    Further details concerning tonal alternations, as well as a few con-
sonantal alternations, will be treated in the appropriate grammatical
sections of this study.

    3.6. Stems and morphemically complex forms containing more than two
vowels are rather miscellaneous and non-systematic in terms of the to-
nal sequences they display. The same principles of tone marking, how-
ever, naturally apply in these forms as well. A few illustrations will
suffice to show the variety of tone sequences:

kúmbé'é	'knee'	bhúndùfú	'cloud of dust'
lààwí'à	'sling'	gbómàgbó	'tree (sp.)'
lèélèé	'fish (sp.)'	kὲὲkù'ò	'ground squirrel'
bὲ'ὲsíí	'honor, praise'	góógὲnὲ	'pond'
kɔ̌ŋ-káì	'wood carver'	lìfì-kềŋ	'jail'

3.7. High tone accompanies a syllabic nasal in forms of the first person singular pronoun followed by a stem-initial consonant. There are no other syllabic nasals in Vai. This nasal is unspecified as to position of articulation; it is homorganic with the following consonant. (It is [ŋ́] before /w/, the velar component of which predominates in this context.) It will here be written as /ŋ́/ before all consonants except in a special case to be noted below.[12]

After /ŋ́/ (phonetically [ń] in this case), stem-initial /l/ is always a stop (as it often is for many speakers in any case; see 1.1 above), but with little if any implosion. Where word division is written (which it is in some cases for merely practical reasons or on the basis of intuition), the stem-initial consonant may still be interpreted and written as /l/. The first person singular pronoun also appears before a few morphemes with initial /'/, including /'à/ (a relational particle) and /'ɔ́/ (introducing quotations). Such combinations are written as /ńdà/ and /ńdɔ́/. This is paralleled by innumerable instances of stem final /ŋ/ followed by the same or similar morphemes, in which the sequence of /ŋ/ and /'/ is interpreted and written as /nd/, and is not distinguishable from other cases of intervocalic /nd/. Further details on the morphemes in question will be found in appropriate sections dealing with the grammar later in this study.

Some typical examples of the first person singular pronoun, including phonetic transcriptions, are:

ŋ́ bâ	[ḿ bâ]	'my mother'
ŋ́ fǎ	[ɱ́ fǎ]	'my father'
ŋ́ má tàà	[ḿ má tàà]	'I didn't go'
ŋ́ táá'à	[ń táá'à]	'I went'
ŋ́ sûŋ	[ń sûŋ]	'my nose'
ŋ́ lá	[ń dá]	'my mouth'
ŋ́ já	[ɲ́ já]	'my eyes'
ŋ́ kɛ̆ŋ	[ŋ́ kɛ̆ŋ]	'my foot'
ŋ́ kŭŋ	[ŋ́ kŭŋ]	'my head'
ŋ́ kpà̀	[ŋɱ̀ kpà̀]	'what is owed to me'

3.8. One allotonic phenomenon is worthy of note. Between a high tone and either low or high, the compressed sequence low-high accompanying a single vowel gives the impression of being a rather level tone

which one might at first want to interpret as "mid"; at best, the rise
is far from conspicuous. There is no reason, however, to posit a third
level tone to account for this phenomenon. Further, this compression
of low-high does not affect the discrete-level character of tone se-
quences; a following high tone is just as high as any preceding high
tone. This phenomenon may be heard in sequences like the following:

ànú'à kéŋĕ fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'they saw the house'
ànúì kéŋĕ fɛ́'ɛ́'à	'they will see the house'

A sequence of two vowels, each with low-high, compounds this effect;
each low-high may give the impression of being level, the second a lit-
tle lower than the first. The following thus sound like "terracing,"
but structurally are not:

ànú má kɔ̌ŋĕ fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'they didn't see the tree'
ànú má bǎǎ fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'they didn't see the goat'

3.9. In discussions of the establishment of a practical orthogra-
phy, for innumerable African languages and probably for languages else-
where as well, resistance to any indication of tone has been exceeding-
ly common, and has often approached the level of irrationality. The
plea is commonly heard that a native speaker can tell what tone is in-
tended "from the context." In the case of Vai, the relatively small
number of minimal contrasts might be cited for further support. The
above discussion, however, demonstrates first that far more than bare
lexical tone must be considered. There are many more instances than
mere lexical tones would suggest in which "context" would be useless
even to a native speaker of Vai; it would be unfortunate if he could
not tell whether the indefinite or definite form of a noun is intended
in a number of cases. In addition, of course, an unambiguous represen-
tation of tone is absolutely essential to a non-Vai who hopes to learn
to speak the language accurately, read it aloud intelligibly, or study
its structure. This is by no means intended to suggest that tone be
consistently marked primarily as a favor to the relatively few expatri-
ates, such as missionaries and Peace Corps Volunteers, who may find it
useful or desirable to learn Vai. The Liberian government has ex-
pressed its intention, and has begun the implementation of programs, to
teach Vai and other Liberian languages to other than their native spea-

kers, as well as to promote literacy among those who are native speakers. In a very real sense, the foregoing discussion, in addition to being a descriptive linguistic statement and a linguist's strong preference for a practical orthography, may be considered to be dedicated to the aspirations and best interests of Liberia's peoples.

INTONATIONS

4.1. The tones of Vai as described above are heard in isolated words and phrases, and without appreciable difference in complete declarative sentences and in question-word questions.[13] A final low tone in such complete utterances is relaxed, and is the lowest pitch in the utterance. As noted in 3.1 above, a final high tone after low may be slightly lowered. Such sequences may be interpreted as having declarative intonation, and marked by a final period, /./. For purposes of a practical orthography, it is strongly recommended that a period rather than a question mark be used at the end of an utterance containing a question word and expecting an answer; e.g.,

Jɔ̀ mɛ̀nú.	'Who's that?'
Míá bàndà mù à ná'à.	'When did he come?'

4.2. Questions which may be answered with assent or dissent are marked by a question intonation which affects only the final tone of the utterance. A final high tone is considerably higher than in declarative intonation, and a final low tone is actualized as a rise. (Morphemes that may occur in utterance-final position are restricted to certain classes; it is my impression that no such morpheme ends with a single vowel having low-high or high-low tone.) Question intonation may be indicated by a question mark, /?/; it should be noted that this is intended to mark only a phonologic intonation, not every logical question. E.g.,

À bɛ̀ nú?	'Is he there?'
À bɛ̀ ná-nà?	'Is he coming?'
Ànú má nà?	'Didn't they come?'

In response to such questions, assent is expressed by /hɛ̂ɛ̂/ 'Right!', which after a negative question corresponds to English 'No'. Dissent is expressed by /kpé'é/ 'Wrong!' (or, marginally to the phonologic sys-

tem, by a sequence of nasals interrupted by a glottal stop, with the tonal sequence low-high, such as [ǹʔńń]), which after a negative question corresponds to English 'Yes'. That is, the Vai answers indicate whether the statement underlying the question is correct or incorrect, while the English answers indicate whether the correct statement concerning the situation would be affirmative or negative. (The Vai pattern is, of course, characteristic of countless languages; the pattern represented by English is probably less common in languages of the world.)

4.3. A sentence-internal pause, as at the end of a subordinate clause, is intonationally marked in much the same way as are questions, but with a less extreme raising of pitch. This may be marked by a comma, /,/. E.g.,

Á ná'é, mùì à fɛ́'ɛ́'à.   'When he comes, we'll see him.'

CHAPTER 5

MORPHOPHONEMIC ALTERNATIONS

5.1. The usual phonetic realizations of word-final /ŋ/ before word-
initial consonants have been briefly but adequately treated in 1.9
above. The variants of a syllabic nasal with high tone have quite a
different status, simply because they are syllabic; they are treated in
3.7 above. Mention was made there of comparable alternations in the
case of word-final /ŋ/. A somewhat fuller outline is appropriate here,
and certain other alternations are most conveniently treated separately
before turning to more specifically grammatical matters.

First, there is a small group of morphemes, cited in 1.8 above,
which do not appear in utterance-initial position, beginning with /'/.
In all of these, a morpheme-initial [l] may sometimes be heard after a
preceding vowel, but never an initial [ɗ]. Some of these morphemes are
grammatically independent words, and will be so written if a word-final
vowel precedes. The form /'ɔ̀/ 'inside', for example, functions exactly
like a number of other relational nouns (see 6.7 below), and is in fact
the head constituent in relational noun phrases. A form /'à/, one of
at least three homophonous morphemes, shares some of the same uses, and
is interpreted as a relational particle. A second form /'à/ is a ver-
bal construction marker; perhaps arbitrarily, this will be written as a
separate word after a noun subject, but without word space after a pro-
noun subject. A third form /'a/ and the form /'ee/ are verbal suffixes
(see 10.2-4 below), and will always be joined to what precedes without
word space.

These forms may also occur, however, after stems which have a final
/ŋ/. In such cases, the stem-final /ŋ/ and the initial /'/ of the mor-
phemes in question combine as /nd/, which is indistinguishable from
morpheme-internal /nd/. Such combinations will be written without word
space irrespective of the grammatical status of the morpheme with ini-
tial /'/. Comparative examples of these morphemes after vowels and af-

ter /ŋ/ are as follows:

kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ̀	'the inside of the house, in the house'
kpóndɔ̀	'the inside of a bowl, in a bowl' (kpóŋ)
í ŋ̩ kɔ̀ féŋ bɔ́ɔ̌ 'à	'give me something'
í ŋ̩ kɔ̀ jà-fɛ̂ndà	'give me money' (jà-fɛ̂ŋ)
kàíɛ̌ 'à ŋ̩ kè'è	'the man called me'
ànú'à ŋ̩ kè'è	'they called me'
Lɛ̌ndà ŋ̩ kè'è	'Lɛ̌ŋ called me' (Lɛ̌ŋ: female name)
kò'áǎ kpɛ́'à	'the cloth is white'
kò'áǎ fíndà	'the cloth is black' (ᴿfíŋ)
á ná'éè, ...	'when he comes, ...'
á bándéè, ...	'when it is all gone, ...' (ᴿbáŋ)

As noted in 3.7 above, the first person singular pronoun, a syllabic nasal, has been recorded before two of these morphemes: the relational particle /'à/, and /'ɔ́/ introducing a direct quotation. It also appears before the verbal construction marker /'à/, but with quite a different alternant; see 10.4 below. Comparative examples relevant here are the following:

fɛ̀ó bɛ̀ à 'à	'he has asthma'
fɛ̀ó bɛ̀ ńdà	'I have asthma'
à 'ɔ́, ...	'he said, ...'
ńdɔ́, ...	'I said, ...'

5.2. A closely similar alternation is found in a small number of compound nouns. A major type of compound noun shows a tonal alternation in the final member of the compound; hyphenation is used in such "regular" compounds, and it is not necessary to recognize any consonant alternation at that boundary (see 7.1 below). In a smaller number of compounds, however, many of which do not have the tonal alternations characteristic of "regular" compounds, a stem-final /ŋ/ in the first member combines with the stem-initial consonant of the second member to form a nasal-oral sequence indistinguishable from those in stem-internal intervocalic position. Some of these are instances of final /ŋ/ plus initial /l/ combining as /nd/, similar to the alternation de-

scribed above (though the cases above involve only initial /'/, never
initial /l/). There are also a few cases of final /ŋ/ plus initial /b/
combining as /mb/. The remaining cases show voicing of the initial
consonant of the second stem: final /ŋ/ plus initial /k/ combine as
/ŋg/, and final /ŋ/ plus initial /kp/ combine as /ŋgb/. (In several
regular compounds, however, these alternations do not appear.) Most of
the recorded cases of these alternations are listed in 7.4,5 below, and
need not be separately cited here.

5.3. Another similar alternation is found in the sequence of a
stem-final /ŋ/ and a suffix-initial /y/; the resultant combination, at-
tested in one example, is /nj/. The first person singular pronoun also
combines with a morpheme /yè/, a relational particle, to form /ńjè/. A
parallel combining of stem-final /ŋ/ with initial /w/ is not attested,
but the first person singular pronoun combines with a morpheme /wá/
(introducing quotations, like /'ɔ́/ above; /'ɔ́/ appears to be more for-
mal, and is perhaps archaic) as /ŋ́gá/. Comparative examples are:

ᴿkò'òyáà	'enlarge' (ᴿkò'ó 'be large')
ᴿjànjáà	'lengthen' (ᴿjǎŋ 'be long')
ànú'à à fɔ̀ mú yè	'they told (it to) us'
ànú'à à fɔ̀ ńjè	'they told (it to) me'
à wá, ...	'he said, ...'
ŋ́gá, ...	'I said, ...'

5.4. The common tone sequence low-high in nouns has the alternant
low-low before high tone in (1) any modifier, (2) a verb of which the
noun is the object, or (3) the final member of a compound (which then
has high-low rather than low-low; see 7.1 below). This alternation is
not found before a relational noun, nor before the morpheme /á/ used in
possessive constructions with free nouns (cf. 6.2,3 below). (Nouns are
rarely found in other environments, and the alternation is not expected
elsewhere.) Comparative examples, using the noun /mùsú/ 'woman' and in
one case /lìfí/ 'night' as representative of nouns with low-high tone,
are as follows:

mùsúɛ̌	'the woman'
mùsú mɛ̀ɛ́	'this woman'

mùsú fè'á	'two women'
á'à mùsú fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'he saw a woman'
mùsú tɔ́ɔ́	'a woman's name'
mùsú á kò'á	'a woman's cloth'

But:

mùsù náánì	'four women'
mùsù kúndú	'a short woman'
íì mùsù fɛ́'ɛ́'éè, ...	'if you see a woman, ...'
lìfì-kêŋ	'jail' (lit., 'night-house')

The same sequence low-high, as the lexical tone of verb stems, has the same alternant low-low before high in a verbal suffix (of which /'éè/, or optionally /'é/ after intransitive verbs, is the only representative), and in the final member of a compound. Comparative examples are:

àì jì'í'à	'it's going to swell up'
àì jì'ì'éè, ...	'if it swells up, ...'
jì'ì-fêŋ	'boil, abscess'

The same alternation in verb stems is optional before a morpheme with inherently locative meaning which is used in expressions for present action; this is treated fully in 10.5 below.

This alternation, low-low for low-high before a high tone, is thus characteristic of many forms in many combinations. Two combinations in which it does not appear were noted above; it also does not appear in noun modifiers.

5.5. An apparently unique alternation is found in many compounds ending with the noun which independently is /mɔ̌/ 'person'; in such compounds, it has a double vowel, /-mɔ̀ɔ̀/ (or /-mɔ́ɔ́/ depending on the preceding tone). This has been pointed out to me independently, and apart from questions being asked about it, by four or five different speakers of Vai. Relevant compounds are:

támáá-mɔ̀ɔ̀	'idler'	kò'à lɛ́ɛ̀-mɔ̀ɔ̀	'weaver'
jàmbà-mɔ́ɔ́	'herbalist'	sɛ̀nɛ̀ kɛ́-mɔ̀ɔ̀	'farmer'

5.6. A few other morphophonemic alternations, restricted to one or a few forms, may have been overlooked here, but will be noted as rele-

vant examples appear in the following sections. In addition, there are
a few tonal alternations which have a morphemic status (i.e., which are
not environmentally conditioned, as are those described in the fore-
going sections). These will be discussed in connection with the gram-
matical constructions in which they occur.

CHAPTER 6
CATEGORIES OF NOUNS

6.1. Vai nouns fall into two categories, free and relational, a distinction which is typical of the Mande languages. Free nouns are those which may be used without an expressed possessor; by and large, they refer to what may be obtained or disposed of at will ("alienable possessions," or what Heydorn aptly terms "acquirable property"), or are nouns for which possession is irrelevant (e.g., 'night', 'shark'). Relational nouns, on the other hand, normally require an expressed possessor; by and large, they are "inalienable possessions," or what Heydorn refers to as "natural possessions:" blood relatives and certain social affiliates, body parts and one's name, and locative relationships such as the underside or inside of something. In Vai more than in many other languages, relational nouns may be cited in isolation, as /bó'ó/ 'hand', but they are not used in context without an expressed possessor, except for special uses of a few of them. More formally, the two categories of nouns are distinguished by a difference in their construction with a possessor.

6.2. The possessor of a relational noun is immediately preposed to it, with no additional marker for the possessive construction. E.g.,

wù'ǔɛ̌ lá	'the dog's mouth'
kàɛ́ɛ̌ fǎ	'the man's father'

The stem forms of pronouns are used as possessives with relational nouns. The pronoun stems are as follows:

1s:	ɋ́	1pl:	mú
2s:	í	2pl:	wó
3s:	à	3pl:	ànú

Illustrations of these as possessives with relational nouns are:

ŋ́ k̆ɛŋ   'my foot'   mú bâ   'our mother'
í tɔ́ɔ̌   'your name'   wó kùndíì   'your (pl) hair'
à lá'ɔ̀-kù'ɛ̀   'his (/her)   ànú tá   'their possession,
    voice, word, orders'   theirs'

6.3.   The possessor of a free noun is followed by a morpheme /á/ in-
dicating the possessive construction. This is here written as a sepa-
rate word after a noun possessor; e.g.,

        kàíɛ̌ á kéŋɛ̌   'the man's house'
        ŋ́ fǎ á nìíɛ̌   'my father's cow'

The combination of a pronoun with this morpheme /á/ is, however,
here written without space. The first person singular pronoun combines
with /á/, hardly predictably, as /ná/; the second person singular com-
bination is /yá/. Examples of all pronouns in this construction are:

ná wù'úɛ̌   'my dog'   múá kò'áǎ   'our cloth'
yá ká'ìɛ̌   'your hoe'   wóá kèèfèɛ̌   'your (pl) pepper'
àá sámbàǎ   'his basket'   ànúá másàǎ   'their table'

6.4.   The specific form of nouns, formed with a vowel suffix with
low-high tone, is briefly but adequately described in 3.3-4 above. It
will be noted that, in the preceding two sections, the specific form
has not been used with relational nouns, but that it has regularly been
used with free nouns. Although this is not an obligatory pattern, it
does reflect certain realities concerning the nature of relational and
free nouns. For the most part, relational nouns may be thought of as
specific by definition. Specific forms have been recorded in a few ca-
ses, in the speech of Jay Foboi; Fr. Kandakai considers the specific
forms acceptable, but not at all different in meaning from the non-
specific forms which he ordinarily uses.

With possessed free nouns, however, there is a clear distinction in
meaning between specific and non-specific forms. The specific form is
used unless the reference is to only one or some of the totality of
items possessed. For example, either of the phrases /ná tìɛ̌ɛ̌/, /ná tìɛ̀/
might be translated as either 'my chicken' or 'my chickens'; number is
not at issue. The first phrase, however, using the specific form of
the noun, means 'my chicken' only if I own no more than one, or if only
one is under consideration; it means 'my chickens' only in reference to

all of the chickens I own. The second phrase, on the other hand, using
the stem form of the noun, means 'a chicken of mine' or 'some of my
chickens', with the implication that I own others as well.

6.5. As intimated in the foregoing, the concept of singularity as
opposed to plurality is not inherent in free nouns by themselves. The
same form of the noun, for example, is used with the numeral /lòndɔ́/
'one' and with all higher numerals. A distinction must be made, how-
ever, between personal and non-personal nouns. For non-personal nouns,
the stem form has a generic meaning, neither explicitly singular nor
plural. The sentence /ná tìɛ̀ fɛ̀'ɛ̀/, for example, may be translated as
either 'I saw a chicken' or 'I saw chickens'; the reference of /tìɛ̀/
may perhaps better be reflected by the phrase 'chicken flesh' -- though
not in the sense of mass, like 'meat', but rather in the sense of an
unspecified number of chickens. There is, nevertheless, a phrase /tìɛ̀
nú/ which can refer only to more than one chicken. Superficially, it
might appear that /nú/ is a plural marker. Its reference, however, is
not to bare plurality. The sentence /ná tìɛ̀ nú fɛ̀'ɛ̀/ rather implies 'I
saw chickens here and there, but undoubtedly not all that were in the
area.' The reference is to individuated plurality: particular indivi-
dual chickens, not a flock. A free noun without /nú/ is used with re-
ference to many items, as well as to one item, when individuation is
not meant to be expressed.

In the case of personal nouns, on the other hand, the noun by itself
(i.e., without a numeral or other modifier specifying singularity or
plurality) can have only a singular reference; e.g., /ná mùsú fɛ̀'ɛ̀/ can
mean only 'I saw a woman,' not 'I saw women.' If only personal nouns
were to be considered, the morpheme /nú/ might with considerable justi-
fication be interpreted as a simple plural marker: /ná mùsú nú fɛ̀'ɛ̀/
means 'I saw women,' and nothing more need be said about it. Neverthe-
less, even for personal nouns the concept of grammatical number cannot
be said to be basic. Rather, the semantic feature "personal" in Vai
(and apparently generally in West African languages that do not have
morphologic pluralization) implies individuality; by contrast, the fea-
ture "non-personal," as noted above, implies generic reference. It is
only by virtue of its implied individuality that a personal noun by it-
self has singular reference. With a personal noun, therefore, the

first word in the definition "individuated plurality" for the morpheme
/nú/ is redundant, and what remains is mere plurality. Number refe-
rence is, therefore, only secondary in the semantic structure of Vai
nouns, no matter how real it may be.

This seems to be a convenient point at which to observe that the
third person "plural" pronoun /ànú/, cited in 6.2 above, is clearly the
third person "singular" pronoun /à/ followed by the individuated plural
marker /nú/.

6.6. The category of relational nouns, as defined and illustrated
in 6.1-2 above, includes some forms and usages which may be puzzling
without further explanation, and some for which an alternative analysis
might be proposed (and, indeed has been for somewhat comparable pheno-
mena in other Mande languages, with somewhat more justification in some
cases than in others).

Some relatively minor details may be noted first. In all other Man-
de languages known to me, there are two forms translatable as 'child',
one a relational noun referring to one's offspring, and the other a
free noun referring to a youngster without reference to his parents.
Vai has only one stem, /léŋ/, and it is, surprisingly, in the category
of free nouns even when it refers to one's physical progeny; e.g., /ná
léŋ/ 'my child'. All other terms for blood relatives are relational
nouns. There are also a few other personal relational nouns, such as
the following cited with a third person singular possessor:

à tógbàì   'his fellow-initiate' (a person who completed the tri-
                bal initiation ceremonies at the same time as the pos-
                sessor)

à líámɔ́   'his friend' (compare the apparently related regular
                free noun compound /àá líá-mɔ̀ɔ̀/ 'a person who cares
                about him')

à bɔ̌   'his counterpart' (companion in an activity, buddy,
                pal, opponent in a game such as checkers)

The terms for 'husband' and 'wife', on the other hand, are free
nouns, simply the words for 'man' and 'woman'. Thus:

ná kàîɛ̌   'my husband'   ná mùsúɛ̌   'my wife'

Most non-personal relational nouns refer to obviously physical rela-

tionships, such as 'foot' or 'surface'. There are, however, some
others of which the following are examples:

à bɛ̀'ɛ̀   'honor, respect, or praise due to him'

à pàawà   'his wages, his salary, pay due to him'

mú làndá   'our customs, traditional ways' (involving relatively
                 formal social sanctions; cf. the free noun in /múá tè'è-
                 kí'ì/ 'our customs, actions associated with our daily
                 life,' matters with no ritual significance)

A few stems may be used as either relational or free nouns. In one
case there is a semantic extension found in a great many West African
languages: /à kpò'ó/ is 'his skin', but as a free noun /kpò'ó/ means
'paper, letter, book' (probably via 'parchment'). The same stem begins
a free noun phrase of which the final stem is the head: /kpò'ó jàà'é-
kì'à/ 'Hansen's disease' (leprosy, lit. 'red skin disease'; the diagno-
sis may not always be reliable); it is quite likely that terms for
other skin conditions, or for disorders involving other body parts, are
somewhat similarly constructed. Other free noun phrases using normally
relational nouns include the following:

bò'ó fè'á   'two-handled draw knife' (lit., 'two hands')

kèŋ kúndú   'hedgehog' (lit., 'short legs')

A few other stems with physical reference may be used in either ca-
tegory without comparable semantic shifts. The following illustrations
show two words for 'urine'; as free nouns, they are used as the objects
of different verbs, both with the general meaning 'do, act upon':

   Relational:

à sùsù bɛ̀ lún-nà   'her breast is causing her pain'

à kéŋgɔ́'ɔ fíndà   'his urine is dark-colored'

à sɛ́'í fíndà   "

   Free:

léndò'ìɛ̌ bɛ̀ sùsù mì-náà   'the baby is nursing'

à bɛ̀ kéŋgɔ́'ɔ má-nà   'he is urinating'

à bɛ̀ sɛ́'í kɛ́-nà   "

One recorded stem with a non-physical reference may similarly be
used in either category. The stem is /kìní/, which may be defined as

'pitiableness, occasion for sympathy'. As the object of a somewhat
formal and archaic verb meaning 'see, look upon', it is used as a rela-
tional noun in expressions like the following:

  mú kìní jè   'have pity on us'

A closely parallel expression uses /kìní/ as a free noun; in this case,
the implication appears to be that the speaker is acting as the formal
spokesman for a group, as in public prayer. This and another usage as
a free noun are illustrated in the following:

  múá kìníɛ̌ jè   'have pity on us'
  àá kìní bɛ̀ ńdà   'I feel sorry for him' (approxi-
                                         mately 'his pitiableness is on me')

    The relational noun stem /tǎ/ refers to one's possession, what pro-
perly belongs to one. It may be used by itself, or with a free noun
following, in which case it refers to one's 'own'. Another relational
noun with a somewhat similar meaning is /jǎ/. This, however, is used
only with another noun; it refers to what pertains to the possessor by
virtue of his birth or "native" association. These are illustrated in
the following:

  ŋ́ fǎ tá mù   'it is my father's'
  ŋ́ tá kpò'óɛ̌ mɛ̀   'this is my own book'
  ŋ́ jǎ láà   'my home, my home town'
  ŋ́ jǎ wò'ò   'my native language'

    6.7. A number of relational nouns refer, or may in some of their
uses refer, to locative relationships. A few, which can hardly be as-
signed to a different grammatical class, indicate other relationships
which are expressed in English by prepositions. Many of these are most
commonly used (after their obligatory possessor) at the end of a clause,
and function as adverbial complements. A few are used only in this way.
To introduce the problem (which is to some extent illusory) presented
by these forms and their usages, consider the stem /mà/, which basical-
ly refers to the 'top surface' of something, in the following:

  kà'áǎ bɛ̀ sěŋɛ̌ mà   'the snake is on the rock' (lit.,
                                       'the snake is-at the rock's surface')

    The frequent use of some stems, and the exclusive use of a few, in

this construction, along with the fact that English prepositions are
typically used to translate them, has given rise to the notion, wide-
spread among students of other Mande languages which show somewhat si-
milar patterns, that these constitute a separate morphologic class
which may be labelled "postpositions." Such a class (but probably much
smaller than supposed) may perhaps be validly posited in some languages.
Too often, however, the concept seems to be used as a facile way of ex-
plaining some of the facts in the comfortable English-oriented shadow
of "prepositions," while more basic aspects of the structure are quiet-
ly ignored or perhaps considered aberrant. For Vai, a survey of the
morphemes in question, and their usages, will show that the concept of
"postpositions" is awkward if not downright deceptive.

     Among the likely candidates for a category of "postpositions," in
addition to /mà/ as illustrated above, are the morphemes /fɛ̀/ 'area
alongside of', /tɛ́/ 'area between or among', and /ɔ̀/ 'inside'. The
last of these, indeed, one might be tempted to call a suffix, since it
is commonly pronounced without a phonetic initial consonant. Examples
of these in adverbial complements are as follows:

sɔ̀ à fɛ̀	'go along with him, follow him'
à bɛ̀ sɔ́ɔ́kɔ̀-nà mɔ̆ɣ nú tɛ̀	'he's pushing through the crowd'
à bɛ̀ kéŋɛ̆ 'ɔ̀	'he's in the house'

Any of these stems may also, however, be used as the subject or object
of a verb, and therefore clearly function as nouns; the following are
illustrative:

sɛ̆ŋɛ̆ mà kpàndí'à	'the surface of the rock is hot'
à bɛ̀ à mà jì'à-náà	'he is displaying it for sale'
	(lit., 'he is showing its surface')
à bɛ̀ jí fɛ̀ má-nà	'he is fishing' (lit., 'he is act-
	ing-on the side/edge of water')
mú'à à tɛ́ tɛ̀	'we split it, we cut it in half'
lɛ̆ɛ̆ 'ɔ̀ nɔ́ɔ́'à	'the inside of the pot is dirty'
à 'ɔ̀ fá'àndà	'it changed'
ànú'à à 'ɔ̀ fà'àŋ	'they changed it'

(The verb stem /ᴿfá'àŋ/ in the last two of these examples is attested
only with /'ɔ̀/ 'inside' as subject or object; it is the combination

that means 'change'.)

There are, however, other forms which are used only in adverbial complements, never (at least in the available data) as subject or object. Of the four known relevant forms, two have a locative reference. Of these, /bà'à/ refers to 'inherent location'; as is true generally in Niger-Congo languages, one cannot go to a person, but only to where he is. The same word is used after a verb meaning 'speak'. (Another relational noun, /tì-nà/, appears to refer to 'location' in a more temporary sense and, though not so recorded, can undoubtedly be used as the object and perhaps subject of a verb.) A second form, /mâì/, seems to refer basically to 'overall surface', but is also used with reference to the area beside or near the possessor. Of the two forms with non-locative reference, one is /'à/, which expresses the 'association' or 'involvement' of the possessor with a situation or action. Finally, /yè/ has an applicative force, generally reflected by translations with 'to' or 'for'. These forms appear finally in the following:

ànú táá'à mànjáǎ bà'à	'they went to the chief'
à gú'ù'à à bà'à	'he ran toward it'
ànú kóáí'à mànjáǎ bà'à	'they spoke to the chief'
à'à tú'ú mà ŋ́ máì	'he rubbed oil on me'
kàsé bɛ̀ à máì	'it's rusty' (i.e., rust is on it)
sɔ̀ ŋ́ máì	'stand beside me'
jì'ì-fêŋ bɛ̀ à 'à	'he has a boil'
à'à kò'ò sɔ̀ kɛ́ 'à	'he stopped work'
í ì tìɛ̀ kpààtóó 'à	'cut it with a cutlass'
à bɛ̀ ná-nà kɔ̀'ɔ́ 'à	'he's bringing (coming with) rice'
à'à tɔ̀ɔ̀nyáà fɔ̀ í yè	'he told you the truth'
à bɛ̀ sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà mú yè	'he's working for us'

Even these forms, which do not have obvious nominal uses as subject or object of a verb, hardly justify positing a class of "postpositions". The fact that they are indeed "postposed" to a noun or pronoun is especially irrelevant; the same is true, after all, of /fǎ/ 'father' and all other relational nouns. It would seem entirely legitimate, in the light of the Vai usages, to refer to all of the forms that have been cited as relational nouns, and then to observe that many of them may be used in an adverbial complement construction, and a few only in that

construction.

It must be admitted, however, that the adverbial complement con-
struction has something of a special status. In addition to the fact
that a few forms appear only in this construction, there is one rela-
tional noun which has a special tonal alternant when so used. The stem
/bó'ó/ 'hand, arm' has high tones in its more obvious nominal usages.
It has low tones, /bò'ò/, however, when used in an adverbial complement
in the common expression for personal possession, the thing possessed
being in or at one's hand. (That the same stem is being used is obvi-
ous from numerous other Mande languages.) E.g.,

ŋ́ bó'ó bɛ̀ ŋ́ lún-nà	'my hand hurts (me)'
kápà náánì bɛ̀ ŋ́ bò'ò	'I have four cents'

In recognition of the restriction of a few forms to the adverbial
complement construction, they may be given the special label "relatio-
nal particles." It remains crucially important to recognize, however,
that many other forms frequently used in this construction, in spite of
their semantic similarity to English prepositions, are full-fledged
nouns with obvious nominal usages.

6.8. Several forms are probably best analyzed as compound relatio-
nal nouns rather than as sequences of independent relational nouns.
Most of these have /'ɔ̀/ or /'à/ as their final element, but even with
/'ɔ̀/ the specific meaning 'inside' cannot always be recognized. The
final morpheme is /mà/ in one recorded case. In the following, the de-
rivations are obvious:

à já	'his eye, his eyes'
à já'à	'his face, the area in front of him'
à já'ɔ̀	'the front surface of it'
à kpáà	'his buttocks'
à kpáà'ɔ̀	'the area behind or on the other side of it'
à kŭŋ	'his head'
à kùmà	'the top of it'

In two recorded cases, the uncompounded stems used initially in such
compounds are not attested in Vai, but are known from other compounds
or from cognates in other northern Mande languages. These are:

à wá'á'ɔ̀   'his side' (cf.: à wá'á-kù'ù 'his ribs')

à kɔ́'ɔ̀   'his back, the area behind him, the area under it'

The latter of these, like /à kpâa'ɔ̀/ cited above, may refer to the area
behind something like a house. Where a contrast is possible, however,
it is as illustrated in the following:

kà'áǎ bɛ̀ sĕŋɛ̌ kɔ́'ɔ̀   'the snake is under the rock'

kà'áǎ bɛ̀ sĕŋɛ̌ kpáà'ɔ̀   'the snake is behind the rock'

The form /kɔ́'ɔ̀/ is also used as an adverb, without a possessor, in one
recorded expression:

à tó'à kɔ́'ɔ̀   'he drowned' (lit., 'he stayed under')

A stem /bú/, probably originally a relational noun meaning 'abdomen,
stomach', is used as a free noun meaning 'pregnancy', and as a relatio-
nal noun meaning 'width'. The reference 'abdomen, stomach' is ex-
pressed by a compound with /'ɔ̀/. The second and the last two of the
following examples show homophonous sequences that are grammatically
different, as reflected by word division in one case but not in the
others:

à'à bú bì   'she became pregnant' (lit., 'she
                          picked up pregnancy')

à bɛ̀ bú 'ɔ̀   'she is pregnant' (lit., 'she is in
                          pregnancy')

kí'àǎ bú kò'ò   'the road is wide'

kí'àǎ bú lɔ̀ɔ̀   'the road is narrow'

tɔ̀ɔ̀nɔ́ɔ́ bɛ̀ à bú'ɔ̀   'he has worms'

ŋ́ bú'ɔ̀ bɛ̀ tó'l-nà   'I have stomach cramps' (lit., 'my
                          stomach is twisting')

Other compound bases, explicitly marked as such by tonal alterna-
tions, are treated in 7 below.

6.9. A morpheme /wá/ (homophonous with /wá/ introducing quotations;
cf. 5.3 above) is interpreted as a relational noun, with three somewhat
similar but distinct usages. First, this /wá/ is used with singular
pronouns to form nominals, corresponding to "independent pronouns" in
many languages; the combination with the first person is /ŋ́gá/. Thus:

```
ŋgá mù              'it's me'
í wá mù             'it's you'
à wá mù             'it's him'
```

The plural pronoun stems are attested before /wá/ in some usages, but
before the identifier /mù/, as in the above, special forms are con-
structed with /ànú/ after the pronoun stem. Thus:

```
múànú wá mù         'it's us'
wóànú wá mù         'it's you'
ànúànú wá mù        'it's them'
```

   Second, the same /wá/ is very commonly used after a noun to express
emphasis, rather like English 'himself, herself, itself.' Actually, it
was sentences like the following that were the first responses when an
effort was made to elicit a construction of topicalization:

```
ŋ́ fǎ wá ná'à               'my father himself came'
jɜ wá 'à à mà              'who did it?'
ná mànjáǎ fǎ wá fɛ̀'ɛ̀       'I saw the chief's father himself'
```

The last of these was first given as an equivalent of 'it was the
chief's father that I saw.' In affirmative sentences, however, there
is another construction of topicalization which parallels constructions
in many other languages; it will be discussed more fully at a later
point, but is illustrated here for purposes of comparison:

```
mànjáǎ fǎ mù ná à fɛ̀'ɛ̀       'it was the chief's father I saw'
```

In this sentence, the object pronoun /à/ recapitulates the fronted ob-
ject /mànjáǎ fǎ/ 'the chief's father'. /mù/ indicates identification,
'it is'.

   Third, this /wá/ is used before a form /ŋgǎ/, which appears to be
another relational noun, to express '-self' in both intensive and re-
flexive uses. In reflexive phrases, a pronoun possessor is (naturally)
obligatory. In intensive phrases used as subject, /wá/ appears again
after /ŋgǎ/. The recorded usages are illustrated by the following:

```
à wá ŋgǎ wá ná'à            'he himself came'
ŋgá ŋgǎ wá 'à ànú fɛ̀'ɛ̀      'I myself saw them'
ŋ́ fǎ wá ŋgǎ wá ná'à         'my father himself came'
ànú'à ànú wá ŋgǎ fɛ̀'ɛ̀       'they saw themselves'
```

```
ná ŋ́gá ŋgǎ fɛ̀'ɛ̀              'I saw myself'
mùsúɛ̌ 'à à wá ŋgǎ fɛ̀'ɛ̀       'the woman saw herself'
```

An alternative for the above intensive and reflexive phrases uses
another relational noun, /bɛ́'ɛ̀ɛ̌/ (apparently with the specific suffix).
When used as a subject, this also requires /wá/ after it. Equivalents
of the above examples are:

```
à bɛ́'ɛ̀ɛ̌ wá ná'à              'he himself came'
ŋ́ bɛ́'ɛ̀ɛ̌ wá 'à ànú fɛ̀'ɛ̀     'I myself saw them'
ŋ́ fǎ bɛ́'ɛ̀ɛ̌ wá ná'à          'my father himself came'
ànú'à ànú bɛ́'ɛ̀ɛ̌ fɛ̀'ɛ̀        'they saw themselves'
ná ŋ́ bɛ́'ɛ̀ɛ̌ fɛ̀'ɛ̀            'I saw myself'
mùsúɛ̌ 'à à bɛ́'ɛ̀ɛ̌ fɛ̀'ɛ̀      'the woman saw herself'
```

What appears to be an even more emphatic intensive is illustrated in
the following:

```
ŋ́ bɛ́'ɛ̀ɛ̌ ŋ́ búù wá ná'à       'I, myself, came'  (lit., 'myself my
                               body itself came')
```

6.10. The foregoing has established two categories of nouns, free
and relational, and in particular has shown that many forms whose gram-
matical classification is not transparent on the basis of superficial
semantic features are actually relational nouns. There remain, how-
ever, a very few morphemes which are more difficult to categorize.
Perhaps they are not nouns at all, but they share some of the charac-
teristics of nouns, and it does not seem possible at present to fit
them conveniently into any other class, nor entirely justifiable to po-
sit one or more separate classes to accomodate them.

Two of these seem to have something of a demonstrative significance,
apparently referring to something previously mentioned or something
that is obvious, perhaps because it is being touched or held. One of
these, /kɛ̌/ (/kɛ̀/ before high tone), is used both with and without a
preceding noun or pronoun. The other, /bhì'í/, is used only with a
preceding noun or pronoun, as if it were a relational noun. Usages
like the following have been recorded:

```
à kɛ̀ wá bɛ̀ ŋ́ bò'ò           'it's what I have' (referring to an
                               amount of money previously quoted)
```

kὲ tɔ̀ŋ sé'ὲŋ nέí   'this one is thirty cents'

mbὲ kὲ ká'à sé'ὲŋ nέí   'I'll sell this one for thirty cents'

mɔ̌ bhì'í mù   'it's the person' (e.g., that you

                                     were looking for)

féŋ bhì'í mὲ   'this is the thing' (similarly)

à bhì'í káŋgɔ́'ɔ, ...   'after this, ..., afterwards, ...'

These are not, however, the ordinary demonstratives, which are /mὲέ/ 'this' and /mὲnúú/ 'that'. The demonstratives are not used after pronouns. On the other hand, /kἓ/ is attested with a demonstrative after it, in the phrase /à kἓ mὲέ/ 'this one'. Yet, with a formation like that of the remote demonstrative, there is also a form /kὲnúú/ 'that one, the other one'. Unlike most other categories and usages in Vai, these are not paralleled in other languages familiar to me. They may be very common, but their usages are such that they cannot readily be elicited; they can only be observed through a much longer period of exposure to the language.

Finally, an unclassified morpheme /pέ'έ/, meaning 'also' or 'in turn', is used after nouns or pronoun stems. If it were used only after nominals (including phrases like /à wá/ as described in 6.9 above), it could probably be classified as an adverb; its use after the stem forms of pronouns suggests including it here. Examples are:

kɔ̀'ɔ́ pέ'έ sàŋ   'buy rice too'

ŋ́ pέ'έ ŋ́ kɔ̀   'give me (some) too'

í pέ'έ, yá mbê wá mà   'and you, what did you do?'

CHAPTER 7
NOUN BASES

7.1. Most of the nouns cited up to this point have had bases consisting of a single stem; some compound nouns have been included, but have not been systematically described. A great many nouns, however, both free and relational, have bases consisting of more than one stem. There are several types of such composite noun bases; by all odds the most common of them -- more than 130 have been recorded -- may be termed "regular compounds."

Most regular compounds consist of two stems. The first member may be a free noun, a relational noun, or a verb. The second member is in almost all cases a free noun or a relational noun, though one stem classified as an adjective is attested in this usage. Regular compounds are formed by a special tone rule, and are written with a hyphen between the two members. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that this use of hyphenation is intended specifically to signal the application of this tone rule. In a practical orthography, hyphenation should be used systematically; decisions as to where to use a hyphen should not be made independently for every combination where a hyphen might be suggested. Above all, the use of hyphens should under no circumstances be determined by the structure of the English equivalents of the forms in question (a practice which has actually been followed in some African languages!). Hyphenation can be most systematically used if it is used only where certain tonal alternations appear. These alternations appear only in "regular compounds" (including a verb stem with a suffix, which is actually nominal). If the tones of the first member of such a compound are high, high-low, low, or miscellaneous (cf. 3.6 above), those tones are unchanged, but the tones of the second member are all low, no matter what tones the stem has independently. If the tones of the first member are independently low-high, they become low throughout, and the tones of the second member are high-low. Examples

of regular compounds with their derivations are:

jí-sòò   'water hole, well': /jí/ 'water', /sóó/ 'hole'

wúnú-kɔ̀ŋ   'pestle': /wúnú/ 'mortar', /kɔ̌ŋ/ 'stick'

káŋ-jù'ù   'necklace': /káŋ/ (rel) 'neck', /jù'ú/ 'rope'

lúŋ-fèŋ   'sore': /ᴿlúŋ/ 'hurt', /féŋ/ 'thing'

bó'ó-lò'ì   (rel) 'finger': /bó'ó/ (rel) 'hand, arm', /ló'ì/
                 'young, undeveloped'

kávù-jàndà   '*kávù* thatch': /kávù/ 'rattan (or similar plant,
                 sp), /jàndá/ '(piassava) thatch'

zíì-mànjà   'clan chief': /zíì/ 'tribe, clan', /mànjá/ 'chief'

bí'à-kàì   (rel) 'father- or brother-in-law (of a man)':
                 /bí'à/ (rel) 'in-law (of a man), /kàí/ 'man'

bâ-lèŋ   (rel) 'maternal aunt': /bâ/ (rel) 'mother', /léŋ/
                 (rel) 'child'

sá'à-jà'à   'long fish net': /ᴿsá'à/ 'pull, drag', /jà'á/
                 'hammock'

bàŋ-kpɛ̀   'piassava palm wine': /bàŋ/ 'piassava palm', /kpɛ́/
                 'alcoholic beverage'

bò'ò-kùù   'garden': /bò'ò/ 'cultivated greens', /kúú/ 'fenced
                 enclosure near one's house'

màà-wù'ù   'angry or suspicious dog': /màà/ 'anger', /wù'ú/
                 'dog'

fɛ̀-mɔ̀ɔ̀   (rel) 'follower': /fɛ̀/ (rel) 'area beside', /mɔ̌/
                 'person'

gɔ́íwà-kɔ̀ŋ   'guava tree': /gɔ́íwà/ 'guava', /kɔ̌ŋ/ 'tree'

gùmàtɛ̀tɛ̀-jù'ù   '*gùmàtɛ̀tɛ̀* vine': /gùmàtɛ̀tɛ̀/ 'fruit (sp)', /jù'ú/
                 'vine'

jàmbà-mɔ́ɔ̀   'herbalist': /jàmbá/ 'leaf', /mɔ̌/ 'person'

kɔ̀ŋ-kpôŋ   'wooden bowl': /kɔ̌ŋ/ 'tree', /kpóŋ/ 'bowl'

kɔ̀ŋ-káì   'wood carver; master drummer': /kɔ̌ŋ/ 'tree, wood,
                 stick', /kàí/ 'man'

lìfì-kêŋ   'jail': /lìfí/ 'night', /kéŋ/ 'house'

kùŋ-kpásà   'head cloth': /kǔŋ/ (rel) 'head', /kpàsá/ 'ker-
                 chief'

nɔ̀ɔ̀-kɔ́'ɔ̀   (rel) 'point of the elbow': /nɔ̀ɔ́/ (rel) 'bend of
                 the elbow', /kɔ́'ɔ̀/ (rel) 'area behind'

kì'ì-kó'à   'wrapper (cloth tied around waist as skirt)':
                    /ᴿkì'í/ 'tie', /kò'á/ 'cloth'

jì'ì-fêŋ   'boil, abscess': /ᴿjì'í/ 'swell up', /féŋ/ 'thing'

A very few bases (no more than five instances are recorded) are most
conveniently included here in spite of the fact that they are apparent-
ly irregular in tone. The tones have been carefully checked, and are
recognized as irregular with no explanation. These are:

kpàndí-lèè'à   'small house lizard': /kpàndí/ 'heat' (??), /lèè'á/
                    'lizard' (the expected tones are low-low with the
                    first member, and high with the first vowel of the
                    second member)

kùndɔ-kí'ì   'thinking': /kùndɔ/ 'in the head' (a compound of
                    /kŭŋ/ and /'ɔ/), /kí'í/ 'manner' (?) (low-low is
                    expected in the second member; cf. /kùndɔ-bɔ'ɔ/
                    'cap': /bɔ'ɔ/ 'bag')

tì-nà   (rel) 'place where one is': /ᴿtì/ 'be at', /na/
                    (bound morpheme or suffix indicating place, inhe-
                    rent tone unknown; cf. /sìì-nâà/ 'a place to sit':
                    /ᴿsìí/ 'sit') (high-low with double vowel is ex-
                    pected with the second member)

tì-mɔɔ   (rel) 'owner': /ᴿtì/ 'be at' (as above ?), /mɔ/
                    'person' (high-low is expected with the second
                    member)

sɔ-fêŋ - sɔ-fèŋ 'domestic livestock; buildings (a new usage)':
                    /ᴿsɔ/ 'stand, build, raise (livestock)', /féŋ/
                    'thing' (the two forms are given as alternants,
                    both commonly used; only the second, which is re-
                    gular, uses the stem form of the verb)

One other recorded form may appear to be irregular, but is not:
/fì'àndéŋ-jì/ 'converging streams': /fì'àndéŋ/ 'twins', /jí/ 'water'.
In this case, the first member is itself a composite base, of a type
described in 7.4 below; it ends with the stem /léŋ/ 'child', which re-
tains its stem tone.

A sub-type of regular compounds consists of those whose bases in-
clude three stems. In many of these, the first member is a free or re-

lational noun followed by the relational noun /'ɔ/ 'inside'. Since
this is not phonologically a separate word in any case, and is not
written with a hyphen before it, such forms constitute only a minor ad-
dition to the above. Examples are:

fí'á'ɔ-sùɛ̀   'wild animal': /fí'á/ 'unused land, the bush',
                /sùɛ́/ 'animal'
kú'ú'ɔ-tù'ù   (rel) 'bone marrow': /kú'ú/ (rel) 'bone', /tú'ú/
                'oil'
lá'ɔ-kù'ɛ̀   (rel) 'voice, words': /lá/ (rel) 'mouth', /kú'ɛ̀/
                (rel) 'sound, voice'

There are probably a great many more regular compounds whose bases
consist of three stems than those noted here (which must be carefully
distinguished from the composite noun bases described in the following
section). In the following, the tone rule for compounds applies to
both the second and the third members. The few recorded examples are:

tò-kí'à-fɛ̀   'gift to one's host when he accompanies a guest part
                way home': /^{R}tɔ̌/ 'stay, leave (behind)', /kí'à/
                'path, road', /fɛ̀/ 'area beside'
màì-lú'ù-wò'ò 'boasting': /màí/ 'insulting speech or actions',
                /lù'ù-wó'ò/ 'language' (the final member is not
                attested for its independent tones, but compara-
                tive evidence suggests /wó'ó/)
sìì-lú'ù-wò'ò 'boasting (based on status)': /^{R}sìí/ 'sit' (thus
                'be rich'), /lù'ù-wó'ò/ 'language' (as above)
jáó-lù'ù-wò'ò 'complaining': /^{R}jáó/ 'become spoiled', /lù'ù-wó'ò/
                'language' (as above)

7.2. A number of nominalizations of object plus verb have been re-
corded, and the formation is productive; as noted below, two nominali-
zations of subject plus verb, perhaps non-productive, have been recor-
ded. In nominalizations of object plus verb, the stem tones of the
verb are unchanged if they are independently high or high-low; a verb
whose stem tones are low-high, however, has an alternant with high-high
in this construction. Both the tonal behavior and the grammatical re-
lationships in these composite bases suggest that it is preferable to
write the object and verb as separate words. Some examples are:

máá kɛ́	'training': /máá/ (rel) 'training, upbringing', /ᴿkɛ́/ 'do'
sɔ̀ kɛ́	'work, working': /sɔ̌/ 'work, labor, job', /ᴿkɛ́/ 'do'
kò'à lɛ̂ɛ̀	'weaving': /kò'á/ 'cloth', /ᴿlɛ̂ɛ̀/ 'weave'
kɔ̌ŋ tíɛ́	'cutting down trees': /kɔ̌ŋ/ 'tree', /ᴿtíɛ́/ 'cut'
lá'ɔ̀ kí'í	'stuttering': /lá'ɔ̀/ (rel) 'inside of the mouth', /ᴿkì'í/ 'tie'
nyɔ̂ɔ̀ bɛ́ŋ	'a meeting': /nyɔ̂ɔ̀/ 'the other one, one another', /ᴿbɛ̌ŋ/ 'meet, assemble'
bɛ̀'ɛ̀ síí	'honor': /bɛ̀'ɛ̀/ (rel) 'honor, respect (due to one)', /ᴿsìí/ 'sit, set'
té'é bí'á	'umbrella': /té'é/ 'sun', /ᴿbì'á/ 'catch'

An object-verb nominalization, in which the object is itself a compound, may be used in sentences like the following; the productivity of the formation should be evident from the fact that the probably unprecedented sentence (constructed on the eleventh day of work, before remembering to learn to say 'yes' and 'no') was accepted without question, and its intended meaning fully understood:

mɔ̌ á lù'ù-wó'ò'ɔ̀ ká'á ì ŋ́ fà'á sà   'I enjoy analyzing languages' (lit., 'studying the inside of people's languages makes my liver lie down': /mɔ̌ á lù'ù-wó'ò'ɔ̀/ 'person's language-inside', /ᴿká'á/ 'learn, study', /ì/ (verbal construction marker), /ŋ́ fà'á/ 'my liver', /ᴿsá/ 'lie down, lay down')

The two recorded nominalizations of subject plus verb, both with the same subject, can only suggest that, in addition to the verb stem having high tones, the subject noun may have low tones irrespective of its stem tones:

tè'è bɔ́	'sunrise': /té'é/ 'sun, /ᴿbɔ́/ 'come out'
tè'è jí'í	'sunset': /té'é/ 'sun, /ᴿjì'í/ 'go down'

7.3. An object-verb nominalization like those described above may be used as the first member of a compound, of which the second member is the head noun, though not necessarily the logical subject of the verb preceding it. The object-verb nominalization retains its independent tones (and is written without hyphenation), but the compound for-

mation with the final noun is regular, as defined in 7.1 above, and
therefore written with hyphenation. About thirty-five bases of this
type have been recorded, over half of which are agentives with the noun
/mɔ̌/ 'person'. The formation is productive, and undoubtedly countless
more combinations are used or could be invented. Some examples are:

bú'ɔ̀ bɔ́-bò'ì   'laxative': /bú'ɔ̀/ (rel) 'abdomen, stomach, /^{R}bɔ́/
                         'go out, remove', /bó'í/ 'medicine'

féŋ lɔ́ŋ-bò'ò   (rel) 'right hand': /féŋ/ 'thing', /^{R}lɔ́ŋ/ 'eat',
                         /bó'ó/ (rel) 'hand, arm'

fí'á lɔ́ŋ-mɔ̀ɔ̀   'hunter': /fí'á/ 'unused land, the bush', /^{R}lɔ́ŋ/
                         'enter', /mɔ̌/ 'person'

kǎà kɛ́-mɔ̀ɔ̀   'thief': /kǎà/ 'stealing', /^{R}kɛ́/ 'do', /mɔ̌/ 'person'

sɛ̀nɛ̀ kɛ́-mɔ̀ɔ̀   'farmer': /sɛ̀nɛ́/ 'farm' (and as above)

kà'à kɛ́-kèŋ   'school building': /kà'à/ 'learning, education',
                         /^{R}kɛ́/ 'do', /kéŋ/ 'house, building'

kò'à lɛ̂ɛ̀-fèŋ   'loom': /kò'á/ 'cloth', /^{R}lɛ̂ɛ̀/ 'weave', /féŋ/
                         'thing'

kó tíɛ́-bǎǎ   'courthouse': /kó/ 'matter, case', /^{R}tíɛ́/ 'cut, de-
                         cide', /bǎǎ/ 'unwalled shelter'

jí fɛ̀ má-kòndè 'fishing bird': /jí fɛ̀/ 'water's edge', /^{R}má/ 'act
                         on', /kòndé/ 'bird'

One form in this category shows irregular tones in the initial noun:

jè'è lɔ́ŋ-mɔ̀ɔ̀   'town crier': /jé'é/ 'shouting', /^{R}lɔ́ŋ/ 'enter',
                         /mɔ̌/ 'person'

7.4. A few nouns are clearly derived from two stems, but the stems
are joined in such a way that it is impossible to recognize a boundary
that can be indicated by space or a hyphen. A still smaller number of
nouns that could be interpreted as two-word phrases are included here
by analogy. All of these include an intervocalic nasal-oral sequence,
voiced throughout, which is indistinguishable from such sequences with-
in a stem (cf. 1.5). Most of these are derived from phrases consisting
of a free noun plus a relational noun. One, however, is apparently de-
rived from an unidentified stem which must be a free noun, plus an ad-
jective. Two others could be interpreted as regular compounds, and one
follows the rules for regular compounds except that the second member

is a verb, which is not typical of regular compounds.

Three of these have a derivative of /kɔ́'ɔ̀/ (rel) 'back, area behind, area under' as their second member, with its initial consonant voiced:

káŋgɔ́'ɔ̀	(rel) 'throat': /káŋ/ (rel) 'neck'
kèŋgɔ́'ɔ̀	(rel) 'sole of the foot': /kěŋ/ (rel) 'foot'
kéŋgɔ́'ɔ̀	'urine': /kéŋ/ 'house' (reflecting a common practice); cf. /kéŋě kɔ́'ɔ̀/ 'behind the house')

Three more of these add (or appear to add; the derivations are not clear in every case) a nasal before the second member, which is /léŋ/ 'child' in each one:

kà'àndéŋ	'student': /kà'à/ 'learning, education'
fì'àndéŋ	'twins': (the first member is thought to be related to /fè'á/ 'two', in spite of the difference in the first vowel)
kpì'àndéŋ	'boy-friend, girl-friend': (the first member is not identifiable)

One somewhat similar noun may be a unitary stem, but it is also possible that it is derived from an unidentified noun /fɛ́ŋ/ or /fɛ́/ plus an adjective stem /kpɛ́/ 'white', the initial consonant of which is voiced:

fɛ́ŋgbɛ́	'white shirting, broadcloth'

Three similar forms follow the rule for regular compounds, and might be so written except that, in compounds, nasal-oral sequences at the hyphen-marked boundary do not seem to be so consistently identical with stem-medial sequences; otherwise, the first of these could even be an ordinary phrase consisting of noun plus adjective:

kɔ̀ndó'ì	'sapling': /kɔ̌ŋ/ 'tree', /ló'ì/ 'young, undeveloped'
léndò'ì	'baby': /léŋ/ 'child', /ló'ì/ (as above)
kùndûŋ	'headache': /kǔŋ/ (rel) 'head', /^{R}lúŋ/ 'hurt'

Finally, two more forms are included here because of the same nasal-oral sequences; the first of these clearly is, and the second undoubtedly was at one time, free noun plus relational noun. These are:

kéndá'à	'doorway': /kéŋ/ 'house', /lá/ (rel) 'mouth, opening, entrance', /-'à/ (rel, association)

kùndíì   (rel) 'hair': /kǔŋ/ (rel) 'head'; the second member
                     is not used independently, but undoubtedly once re-
                     ferred to hair other than on the head; at present,
                     even body hair or animal hair is called /kùndíì/

7.5.   In another small group of nouns whose bases consist of two
stems, the second member has high tones (compare the rule for regular
compounds, 7.1 above).   Somewhat arbitrarily, these few forms are writ-
ten without space or hyphen.   In two cases there are medial nasal-oral
sequences which cannot conveniently be divided.   In one case, on the
other hand, this convention results in a word-medial (but not stem-
medial) /l/, which is written as such and cannot be elided; in another
case, a medial /ŋk/ appears, which is impossible within a stem.   The
recorded cases are:

kèndó'í   (rel) 'toe': /kěŋ/ (rel) 'foot', /ló'ì/ 'young, un-
                     developed' (compare the regular compound /bó'ó-
                     lò'ì/ 'finger'; strangely, the formations are dis-
                     tinctly different)

kùŋgbéŋgbé   'month of misty rain' (about June?): /kǔŋ/ (rel)
                     'head', /kpé/ 'white' (voiced initially and redu-
                     plicated; beads of misty rain on the hair give a
                     whitish appearance)

béɛ́léŋ   (rel) 'nephew, niece': /béɛ̀/ (rel) 'maternal un-
                     cle', /léŋ/ 'child' (but the phrase /ŋ́ béɛ̀ léŋ/
                     'my cousin (maternal uncle's child)' is a diffe-
                     rent formation)

kàmàkpó'ó   'kind of medicinal bark (thick like elephant hide)':
                     /kàmá/ 'elephant', /kpò'ó/ (rel) 'skin' (compare
                     the regular compound /kàmà-kpó'ò/ 'elephant hide'
                     and the phrase /kàmá kpò'ó/ 'an elephant's hide
                     (of a live elephant)'

fàndèkpó'ó   'skein of yarn': /fàndé/ 'cotton, thread', /kpò'ó/
                     (rel) 'skin', (free) 'paper' (there is apparently
                     no question of a confusion between English 'skein'
                     and 'skin')

wòòjú'ú   'vine (sp)': /wòò/ (unidentified), /jù'ú/ 'vine'
                     (several other compounds with /jù'ú/ are regular)

fàndèkɔ́ŋ   'cotton plant; spool': /fàndé/ 'cotton', /kɔ̌ŋ/
                   'tree, plant, wood, stick'

sòjɔ́ŋ   'donkey': /sǒ/ 'horse', /jɔ̌ŋ/ 'slave' (?)

kpɔ̀ŋkɛ́   'gray monkey': /kpɔ̀ŋ/ 'monkey', second member un-
                   identified

kó'íkpé   'serval (or other species similar to leopard)':
                   /kó'í/ 'leopard', second member unidentified

7.6.   About thirty nouns with fully reduplicated stems have been re-
corded; in no case does the unreduplicated stem occur by itself. In
most cases, the tones as well as the consonants and vowels of the two
parts are identical; six, however, have the tones of regular compounds
(7.1 above), and two have high tones with the second part (7.5 above).
In one case, a word-medial /l/ (for some speakers [ɗ]), which cannot be
elided, must be written. There is some suggestion of a semantic fea-
ture associated with reduplication; several of these nouns, though not
all of them, refer directly or indirectly to numerous items, or to re-
peated actions or motions. Some examples are:

bónìbónì	'gnats'	gbɛ̀ŋgbɛ̀ŋ	'bass drum'
sóìsóì	'mosquitos'	kpɔ́kpɔ́	'hammer'
gɔ̌ɔ̀gɔ̌ɔ́	'crow'	gàŋgàŋ	'sting ray'
hɨ́ɨ̀hɨ̀ɨ̀	'owl'	lèélèé	'fish (sp)'
nyɔ̀ìnyɔ́ì	'measles'	gbɔ̌ŋgbɔ̌ŋ	'okra'
síkòsíkò	'hiccoughing'	fóófóó	'container, load'
wááwáá	'whispering'	mɛ̀ɛ̀mɛ̀ɛ̀	'mirror, glass'

There are also a few reduplicated forms in which the initial voice-
less consonant of the first part is reflected in the second part by a
voiced nasal-oral sequence; e.g.,

kpèŋgbé   'bed'   kpéŋgbé   'frog'

7.7.   Finally, in Vai as probably in languages in general, there are
a number of phrases which, while they do not present any special gram-
matical problem, may deserve mention as constituting lexical units.
Phrases of this type are often classified as "idiomatic." A few exam-
ples are:

pàá kènà   'spider, "old man spider"' (/kènà/ alone is also

        'spider'; /pàá/ does not occur alone; cf. English
        "daddy long-legs")

pàá nyèŋgèsè   'praying mantis'

kpò'ò léŋ   'letter': /kpò'ó/ 'paper', /léŋ/ 'child'

kpò'ò bâ   'envelope': /kpò'ó/ 'paper', /bâ/ (rel) 'mother'

kèŋ kúndú   'groundhog' (?) (lit., 'short legs')

sûŋ kpέ   'putty-nose monkey' (lit., 'white nose')

FREE NOUN PHRASES

8.1. In the course of defining free nouns as a category distinct from relational nouns (6.1-5 above), it was necessary or at least convenient to include descriptions of possessive constructions, a "specific" suffix, and phrases indicating individuated plurality. Other free noun modifiers, in the order in which they occur after the noun, are qualificative attributives, numerals, and demonstratives.

About half of the recorded qualificative attributives are unitary stems. Examples of nouns plus such attributives are:

sámbà námá	'a new basket'	kàì kúndú	'a short man'
kpò'ò kɔ́'ɔ́	'an old book'	kɔ̌ŋ lɛ̀kpɛ̀	'a flexible stick'
sùɛ̀ kú'à	'raw meat'	kéŋ bà	'a large house'
kò'à tá'á	'torn cloth'	kàí nyàmá	'a tall man'
fí'á ló'ì	'young bush'	kí'à nyámá	'a bad road'

Reduplication or optional reduplication is attested in a few cases:

kí'à kpùsákpùsá	'a bumpy road'
gbéŋgbé'é jèè(jèè)	'a rough plank'

Most other qualificative attributives are derived from verb stems by a suffix /-'é/. In these forms, stems whose lexical tones are low-high have the alternant tones low-low; stems whose lexical tones are high-low generally have the alternant tones high-high, but a possible regular exception is recorded in the case of a monosyllabic stem with final /ŋ/, and there are two exceptions in stems of presumed non-Vai origin. Examples are:

mɔ̌ sìì'é	'a rich person': /^{R}sìí/ 'sit' (a rich person does not have to work, but can just sit down)
jí kímá'é	'cold water': /^{R}kímà/ 'be cold'
kò'à nɔ́ɔ́'é	'dirty cloth': /^{R}nɔ́ɔ́/ 'be dirty'

bó'í kóná'é   'bitter medicine': /ᴿkónà/ 'be bitter'

lùmbó'ò ló'á'é 'a sour orange': /ᴿló'à/ 'be sour'

kàí tɔ̀ɔ̀'é   'a fat man': /ᴿtɔ́ɔ́/ 'be fat'

kɔ̀ndɔ́ kpɛ̀ɛ̀'é   'hard wood': /ᴿkpɛ̀ɛ́/ 'he hard' (of 'inside')

kɔ̀ŋ tândé   'a straight stick': /ᴿtâŋ/ 'be straight'

kò'à zénɛ̀'é   'clean cloth': /ᴿzénɛ̀/ 'be clean'

kò'à dhɔ́gbɔ̀'é 'wet cloth': /ᴿdhɔ́gbɔ̀/ 'get wet'

In two recorded cases, attributives are clearly related to verbs, and end in /má/, but no regular rule can be stated for the formation in other respects:

kò'à kpɛ́ɛ́má   'white cloth': /ᴿkpɛ́/ 'be white, light colored'

kò'á fììmá   'black cloth': /ᴿfíŋ/ 'be black, dark colored'

In a few other cases, attributives are formed with the suffix /-'é/ as above, but what precedes is more than a mere verb stem; the full significance of the derivation is unclear. Examples are:

kí'à bú kò'òyáà'é   'a wide road'; cf. /kí'ǎǎ bú kò'ò/ 'the road
                     is wide': /ᴿkò'ó/ 'be large'

kí'à bú lɔ̀ɔ̀yáà'é   'a narrow road': cf. /kí'ǎǎ bú lɔ̀ɔ̀/ 'the road
                     is narrow': /ᴿlɔ̀ɔ́/ 'be small' (/kí'ǎǎ bú/
                     'the road's width')

Little effort was made to elicit sequences of two or more attributives after a noun.[14] Such sequences are not commonly used, but the following were recorded as samples:

          wù'ú fììmá kè'èmá   'a large black dog'

          wù'ú kè'èmá fììmá   "

          wù'ù-bà kè'èmá   'a huge dog'

   cf.:   wù'ú fììmá   'a black dog'

         wù'ú kè'èmá   'a large dog'

         wù'ù-bà   "

8.2. The numeral forms used in counting and as noun modifiers are identical. After counting through five, a special form for 'five' is used, and the forms for 'one' through 'four' are added to it to express 'six' through 'nine'. There is then a new unit for 'ten':

lɔ̀ndɔ́	'one'	sɔ̂ŋ lɔ̀ndɔ́	'six'
fè'á	'two'	sɔ̂ŋ fè'á	'seven'
sàkpá	'three'	sɔ̂ŋ sàkpá	'eight'
náánì	'four'	sɔ̂ŋ náánì	'nine'
sóó'ú	'five'	tâŋ	'ten'

The above forms for 'one' through 'nine' are added directly to /tâŋ/ 'ten' to express 'eleven' through 'nineteen':

tâŋ lɔ̀ndɔ́	'eleven'	tâŋ sɔ̂ŋ lɔ̀ndɔ́	'sixteen'
tâŋ fè'á	'twelve'	tâŋ sɔ̂ŋ fè'á	'seventeen'
tâŋ sàkpá	'thirteen'	tâŋ sɔ̂ŋ sàkpá	'eighteen'
tâŋ náánì	'fourteen'	tâŋ sɔ̂ŋ náánì	'nineteen'
tâŋ sóó'ú	'fifteen'		

The expression for 'twenty' is /mɔ̀ bándé/, literally 'an entire person', presumably (though by no means in any naive, "primitive" way) referring to the total number of fingers and toes. The lower numerals are then added to this phrase after a form /àkɔ́/ (here written as one word, though almost surely originally from /à kɔ́/ 'its back, behind it, after it'). Twenties are multiplied (e.g., /mɔ̌ sàkpá bándé/ 'sixty'), and lower numerals added, through 'ninety-nine'. E.g.:

mɔ̀ bándé àkɔ́ lɔ̀ndɔ́	'twenty-one'
mɔ̀ bándé àkɔ́ sɔ̂ŋ sàkpá	'twenty-eight'
mɔ̀ bándé àkɔ́ tâŋ	'thirty'
mɔ̀ bándé àkɔ́ tâŋ sóó'ú	'thirty-five'
mɔ̌ fè'á bándé	'forty'
mɔ̌ fè'á bándé àkɔ́ tâŋ	'fifty'
mɔ̌ fè'á bándé àkɔ́ tâŋ sɔ̂ŋ fè'á	'fifty-seven'
mɔ̌ sàkpá bándé àkɔ́ tâŋ sóó'ú	'seventy-five'
mɔ̌ náánì bándé àkɔ́ tâŋ sɔ̂ŋ náání	'ninety-nine'

What was probably originally a system that continued according to this pattern through 399 (or perhaps 199) has been simplified by the adoption of the English word 'hundred', in the form /hɔ́ndɔ̂/, which forms the basis for higher additions and multiplications. E.g.,

| hɔ́ndɔ̂ lɔ̀ndɔ́ àkɔ́ mɔ̀ bándé | 'one hundred twenty' |
| hɔ́ndɔ̂ fè'á | 'two hundred' |

hɔ́ndɔ̂ fè'á àkɔ́ mɔ̌ fè'á bándé àkɔ́ tâŋ sóó'ú   'two hundred
                                                             fifty-five'
hɔ́ndɔ̂ sôŋ náánì   'nine hundred'

Similarly, the English word 'thousand' has been adopted in the form /táúsùŋ/.

As noted above, these numerals are used after nouns as modifiers. If the noun has an attributive modifier, the numeral follows it. E.g.:

kéŋ fè'á   'two houses'
kpò'ó mɔ̀ bándé àkɔ́ sóó'ú   'twenty-five books'
sámbà námá sàkpá   'three new baskets'
kàí nyàmá sôŋ fè'á   'seven tall men'

Numerals may be used after the specific form of a noun with a partitive meaning. For other combinations of modifiers, see 8.6 below. E.g.,

kéŋɛ̌ fè'á   'two of the houses'

8.3. The monetary system constitutes a set of free noun phrases which may conveniently be included at this point. As in all other Liberian languages, the monetary system reflects the British system of pounds and shillings, from a time when the pound sterling was the equivalent of four dollars (American or Liberian). The shilling, equivalent of twenty cents, is now divided into twenty cents rather than twelve pence. There are, however, special terms for five cents, ten cents, and fifteen cents, reflecting the British threepence, six pence, and nine pence. The Vai monetary units are:

kápà   'cent'   éétîŋ   'fifteen cents'
fóŋ   'five cents'   sé'èŋ   'twenty cents'
nɛí   'ten cents'   pɔ̂ŋ   'four dollars'

A form /pátà/ 'dollar' is also sometimes used. The form /éétîŋ/ is clearly adopted from English 'eighteen', and originally referred to eighteen half-penny pieces, making nine pence. The pattern followed in using these terms is illustrated by the following:

kápà lòndó	1¢	sé'èŋ lòndó éétîŋ	35¢
kápà fè'á	2¢	sé'èŋ fè'á	40¢
kápà náánì	4¢	sé'èŋ fè'á nɛ́ɛ́ kápà fè'á 52¢	
fóŋ	5¢	sé'èŋ fè'á éétîŋ	55¢
fóŋ kápà lòndó	6¢	sé'èŋ sàkpá	60¢
fóŋ kápà náánì	9¢	sé'èŋ sàkpá éétîŋ	75¢
nɛ́ɛ́	10¢	sé'èŋ sóó'ú	$1.00
nɛ́ɛ́ kápà fè'á	12¢	sé'èŋ sôŋ fè'á nɛ́ɛ́	$1.50
éétîŋ	15¢	sé'èŋ tâŋ	$2.00
éétîŋ kápà sàkpá	18¢	sé'èŋ tâŋ fè'á nɛ́ɛ́	$2.50
sé'èŋ lòndó	20¢	sé'èŋ tâŋ sôŋ fè'á nɛ́ɛ́ $3.50	
sé'èŋ lòndó kápà fè'á 22¢		sé'èŋ tâŋ sôŋ sàkpá	
sé'èŋ lòndó fóŋ	25¢	éétîŋ	$3.75
sé'èŋ lòndó fóŋ		pôŋ lòndó	$4.00
kápà lòndó	26¢	pôŋ lòndó sé'èŋ tâŋ	$6.00
sé'èŋ lòndó nɛ́ɛ́	30¢	pôŋ fè'á	$8.00

8.4.   In some respects, the grammar of numerals is similar to that
of relational nouns. Like relational nouns, numerals immediately fol-
low a noun stem or phrase; in addition, they may be used after the stem
form of a pronoun. Unlike relational nouns, however, they may take the
specific suffix with its ordinary semantic significance. E.g.,

mɔ̌ fè'á	'two people'	ànú fè'áǎ	'both of them'
mɔ̌ fè'áǎ	'the two people'	ànú sàkpá	'three of them'
mú fè'á	'two of us'	ànú tâŋǎ	'the ten of them'

In the light of these usages, certain other words with quantitative
reference may be treated together with the actual arithmetic numerals.
These include the following:

bɔ́ɔ̌	'some'	gbí	'all'
kú'úŋ	'amount, number of'	kámà	'how many?'
kú'úmbà	'a lot of' (/kú'úŋ/	kí'í	'number of' (in rela-
	plus /bà/ 'large')		tive clauses)

Some usages of these are as follows:

í bɔ́ɔ̌ bɔ̀ núú	'take some off (there)' (commonly,
	'reduce the price')

à bɔ́ɔ̌	'some of it'
mɔ̀ bɔ́ɔ̀ nú	'some people'
kò'áǎ bɔ́ɔ̌	'some of the cloth'
ànú kú'úŋ kò'ò	'there are a lot of them' (lit., 'their number is large')
kɔ̀'ɔ̀ kú'úŋ má kò'ò	'rice isn't plentiful'
mɔ̀ kú'úmbà ná'à	'a lot of people came'
àì à gbí sǎndà	'he's going to buy all of it'
ŋ́ wò'ó'à ànú gbí 'à	'I want all of them'
mɔ̀ gbí	'everyone'
kámà mù	'how much is it?' (of price)
kpò'ò kámà mù à'à à sàŋ	'how many books did he buy?'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à sámbà kí'í mú sàŋ	'I don't know how many baskets he bought' (/mú/ marks relatives)

8.5. Ordinal numerals are formed with a suffix /-nà/. There is a special form for 'first', but the suffix is added to the forms for 'two' through 'five', and 'ten' (the only instances which were recorded). The numeral stems in these forms appear with low tones throughout. Ordinals are usually used with the specific suffix, and are so cited in the following examples:

kéŋ sénjénàǎ	'the first house'
kí'à fè'ànàǎ	'the second road'
mɔ̌ sàkpànàǎ	'the third person'
sǎŋ nàànìnàǎ	'the fourth year'
té'é sòò'ùnàǎ	'the fifth day'
ká'ó tàn-nàǎ	'the tenth month'

8.6. There are two demonstrative modifiers, /mɛ̀ɛ́/ 'this and /mɛ̀núú/ 'that'. When used after a numeral higher than one, it is the numeral which indicates plurality. E.g.,

nìí mɛ̀ɛ́	'this cow'
nìí sàkpá mɛ̀ɛ́	'these three cows'
bǎ mɛ̀núú	'that goat'
bà náánì mɛ̀núú	'those four goats'

If there is no other indication of plurality, however, the demonstratives may be pluralized by the addition of the individuated plural

marker /nú/:

  mɔ̌ mɛ̀ɛ̀ nú 'these people'   mɔ̌ mɛ̀núú nú 'those people'

    Demonstratives and the specific suffix are mutually exclusive; only
one can be used in a noun phrase. Similarly, the marker /nú/ and nume-
rical pluralization are mutually exclusive. It should be noted, how-
ever, that a demonstrative follows a numeral but precedes /nú/, as does
the specific suffix. The following are illustrative of noun phrases
using as many of the above types of modifiers as possible:[14]

  sámbà námá fè'áǎ   'the two new baskets'
  sámbà námá fè'á mɛ̀ɛ́   'these two new baskets'
  sámbà námáǎ nú   'the (various) new baskets'
  sámbà námá mɛ̀ɛ̀ nú   'these new baskets'

    8.7. Nouns, and only nouns, may be conjoined by /bɛ́/ 'and':

  kàíɛ̌ bɛ́ mùsúɛ̌   'the man and the woman'
  mùsúɛ̌ bɛ́ àá lɛ́ŋ   'the woman and her child'
  lɛ̀ndɛ̀ námá bɛ́ lɛ̀ndɛ̀ kɔ́'ɔ́   'a new car and an old car'

    If one or both of the conjoined items is a pronoun, however, quite a
different construction is used. The first member is a plural pronoun,
expressing the personal reference and the plurality of the group: /mú/
'we', /wó/ 'you', or /ànú/ 'they'. This is followed by /fè'á/, perhaps
here best equated with 'including'; it is certainly the numeral 'two',
but phrases of this type often refer to more than two members. The fi-
nal member of the phrase is a noun or a pronoun followed by /wá/ (cf.
6.9 above); if this final member is singular, the total group numbers
two, but if it is plural the total group numbers more than two. If the
first member of the group is first person, /mú/, the final member may
be either second or third person; if the first member is second or
third person, /wó/ or /ànú/, the final member can be only third person.
The possibilities permitted by this structure are illustrated in the
following:

  mú fè'á í wá   'you and I'
  mú fè'á à wá   'he/she and I'
  mú fè'á wó wá   'you (pl) and I, you and we'
  mú fè'á ànú wá   'they and I, he and we, they and we'

wó fè'á à wá	'he/she and you (sg)'
wó fè'á ànú wá	'he and you (pl), they and you'
ànú fè'á à wá	'he/she and he/she'
ànú fè'á ànú wá	'he/she and they, they and they'
mú fè'á ɲ́ fǎ wá	'my father and I'
mú fè'á ɲ́ fǎ nú wá	'my father and we'
wó fè'á í fǎ wá	'you (sg) and your father'
wó fè'á í fǎ nú wá	'you (pl) and your (sg) father'
ànú fè'á à fǎ wá	'he and his father'
ànú fè'á à fǎ nú wá	'they and his father'
ànú fè'á ànú fǎ wá	'he and their father'
ànú fè'á ànú fǎ nú wá	'they and their father'
wó fè'á jɔ̂ wá táá'à	'who (sg) went with you (sg)?'

This is the only way in which personal accompaniment can be expressed, as reflected in the translation of the last of the above.

8.8.   Disjunction is expressed by the form /ɔ̀ɔ́/, adopted from English 'or'. A longer form /ɔ̀ɔzì/, the last part of which presumably comes from Mende, is sometimes used. Apparently no inherited expression of disjunction is in current use.

Disjunctive expressions appear to be only closed -- i.e., to permit a choice only between the alternatives named. In a question, open disjunction is implied by adding /ɔ̀ɔ mbê/ 'or what?'. The following illustrations appear to exhaust the possibilities; in the English equivalents, nonstandard punctuation is deliberately used to make the intended English intonations unambiguous:

mbê mù. bááwá ɔ̀ɔ bǎ.	'What is it. A sheep? or a goat.'
bááwá mù. ɔ̀ɔ bǎ.	'Is it a sheep? or a goat.'
í wò'ó'à kɔ̀'ɔ́ 'à? ɔ̀ɔ jɔ̀wɔ́.	'Do you want rice? or sweet potatoes.'
í wò'ó'à kɔ̀'ɔ́ 'à? ɔ̀ɔ jɔ̀wɔ́? ɔ̀ɔ mbê.	'Do you want rice? or sweet potatoes? or what.'

CHAPTER 9
NONVERBAL PREDICATIONS

9.1. Two types of predications are nonverbal in the sense that the predicative words used in them do not enter into the variety of constructions characteristic of verbs. These are "identificative" and "copulative" predications.

The simplest and most obvious kind of identificative predication consists, in the affirmative, of a noun or noun phrase followed by the identificative morpheme /mù/ 'it is'. The negative counterpart uses /mâa/ 'it is not'. E.g.,

bă mù	'it's a goat'
mànjáă mù	'it's the chief'
ŋ́gá tá mù	'it's mine'
jɔ̂ mù	'who is it?'
mbê mù	'what is it?'
ŋ́gá tá máà	'it's not mine'

An identificative predication may also include a reference to that which is being identified. Such a reference may precede the identification; there is little if any pause, but the intonation appears to justify the use of a comma. Alternatively, such a reference may follow the identification, in which case it is followed by the relational particle /'à/. Thus:

tìɛ̀ mènúú, ŋ́gá tá mù	'that chicken is mine'
ŋ́gá tá mù tìɛ̀ mènúú 'à	"
kò'à lɛ́ɛ̀, kàì sɔ́-kɛ̀ mù	'weaving is a man's job'
kàì sɔ́-kɛ̀ mù kò'à lɛ́ɛ̀ 'à	"

Identificative predication is also used with a number of words with qualificative reference. This is, however, by no means the only construction used for qualificative description. Qualificatives may be

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recognized not only as a semantic class, but also as a grammatical
class in that they enter into both predicative and attributive con-
structions (cf. 8.1 above). Different qualificatives, however, are
used in four different predicative constructions. The assignment of
one qualificative to one construction, and another to another construc-
tion, appears to be completely arbitrary. Of those which are used in
identificative constructions, several are unitary stems; a somewhat
larger number, however, are derived from verb stems by the suffix /-'è/.
For all qualificatives in this class, the attributive form is identical
with the form used in predications. In these predications, the quali-
ficative is preceded by a noun or noun phrase, or by the stem form of
a pronoun. Examples are:

lùmbó'ŏ̆ bù'ú mù	'the orange is unripe'
sámbà mὲέ námá mù	'this basket is new'
à ló'ì mù	'he is young'
à kú'à mù	'it is raw'
kàíὲ̆ kì'à'é mù	'the man is sick'
kí'à̆ǎ námàà'é mù	'the road is slippery'
kò'á̆ǎ dhɔ́gbɔ̀'é mù	'the cloth is wet'
à mà'ò'é mù	'he is ashamed'
à kì'à'é máà	'he isn't sick'
sámbà mὲέ námá máà	'this basket isn't new'

In the affirmative only, identificative predication is also the nor-
mal form of topicalization, which will be discussed more fully at a la-
ter point; a few simple examples will serve to illustrate this for the
present:

kúnù mù à ná'à	'it was yesterday that he came'
sámbà mὲέ mù ná'à à sàŋ wɔ̀'έ	'it was this basket that I bought (it) today'

With reference to past time, identification may be expressed in the
same way, with the addition of an adverb. E.g.,

jɔ̂ mù wì	'who was it (just now)?'
jɔ̂ mù kὲ'ὲmà	'who was it (some time ago)?'
jɔ̂ mù nì	'who was it (long ago)?'
à kì'à'é mù wì	'he was sick (not long ago)'

With qualificatives, however, verbal predications are frequently
used for past as well as other non-present references. E.g.,

à kì'á'à   'he got sick'
à mà'ó'à   'he was ashamed'
àì mà'ó'à   'he will be ashamed'
kò'áǎ dhɔ́gbɔ'à   'the cloth is going to get wet'

With nouns (which, of course, may be modified by qualificatives),
verbal predications using an expression meaning 'become', /ᴿtǐ ... kò/,
are also used for other than present reference:

àì tǐ'à mànjáǎ kò   'he will be(come) the chief'
àì tǐ'à mɔ̌ sìì'é kò   'he will be(come) a rich man'

9.2. Copulative predication is the joining of two constructions by
a copula, the most important of which is /bɛ̀/ in the affirmative and
/bé'è/ in the negative. These are used primarily, though not exclu-
sively, in expressions of location. The locative constituent may be a
single word with locative reference, but is very commonly a relational
noun phrase. The copula may be preceded by a noun or noun phrase, or
by the stem form of a pronoun. Examples are:

ànú bɛ̀ nîɛ   'they are here'
ŋ́ fǎ bɛ̀ Dhùkɔ́'ɔ   'my father is in Monrovia'
lòŋgó bɛ̀ kɔ̌ŋɛ̌ mà   'there's a chameleon on the tree'
à bɛ̀ sɛ̌ŋɛ̌ kɔ́'ɔ   'it's under the rock'
à bɛ̀ sɛ̌ŋɛ̌ kpáà'ɔ   'it's behind the rock'
fɛ̀ó bɛ̀ à 'à   'he has asthma'
ŋ́ bâ bé'è núú   'my mother isn't there'
wù'úɛ̌ bé'è kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ   'the dog isn't in the house'
kɔ̀'ɔ́ bé'è ŋ́ bò'ò   'I don't have rice'
mbê kò bɛ̀ núú   'what news is there there?' (a com-
                                   question after greeting)

kàsé bé'è Kàmbá máì   'there's no blame on God' (answer
                                   to the above)

A rather small number of qualificatives are used in copulative pre-
dications; there is no indication that these are or ever were locative
in meaning. All of the qualificatives in this class are unitary stems;
none is derived from a verb. The attributive forms are identical with

the forms used in predications, though a few of them (with a suggestion
of multiple reference, as 'bumpy') may be reduplicated as attributives.
Examples are:

kɔ̌ŋɛ̌ bɛ̀ lɛ̀kpɛ̀	'the stick is flexible'
kàíɛ̌ bɛ̀ kúndú	'the man is short'
à bɛ̀ gbà	'it is different'
à bɛ̀ làà	'it is light (in weight)'
à bɛ̀ lɛ́fɛ́	'it is thin (as sheet metal)'
kɔ̌ŋɛ̌ bɛ́'è lɛ̀kpɛ̀	'the stick isn't flexible'
à bé'è kúndú	'he isn't short'

Also used in copulative predications are qualificative ideophones;
no definition of ideophones is suggested at this point, but the follow-
ing are examples:

kàí mɛ̀núú bɛ̀ tàmùtàmù	'that man is staggering'
kí'ǎ̀ bɛ̀ cɔ̀ìcɔ̀ì	'the road is a muddy mess'
kpɔ̀ndɔ̌ɛ̌ bɛ̀ cɔ̀kpɔ̀cɔ̀kpɔ̀	'the "soup" is really slimy'[15]

From one very important point of view, expressions referring to ac-
tion going on at present should be considered nonverbal predications,
specifically copulative predications of the locative type illustrated
above. There is evidence in any number of Niger-Congo languages, in-
cluding other Mande languages, that expressions of present action are
inherently locative (see Welmers 1973, pp. 312-15, 324). The evidence
in Vai is unambiguous. First, the construction uses the affirmative
copula /bɛ̀/ or its negative counterpart /bé'è/. Second, the verb stem
is followed by a suffix /-nà/, which is amply attested in other combi-
nations as locative in meaning: e.g., /bɔ́-nà/ 'the place one comes from
or has come from'. What is specifically predicative about expressions
for present action is not the verb stem, but the copula. Simple exam-
ples are:

à bɛ̀ táá-nà núú	'he's going there'
ànú bɛ̀ nyíɛ́ lɔ́n-nà	'they're eating fish'
à bé'è ná-nà	'he isn't coming'

Perhaps in part as a cowardly capitulation to traditional grammati-
cal treatments, but also in part because the construction in question

involves verb stems and their tones, objects, complements, and other
characteristics of verbal predications, a fuller treatment of present
action is included with verbal predications in 10 below.

A few expressions have been recorded that appear to be apocopated
copulative predications, with nothing following the copula. E.g.,

ń kpò'ó 'ɔ bé'è   'I'm not feeling well' (lit., 'the
                                     inside of my skin isn't')

With reference to other than the present situation, relationships
like the above are expressed by verbal predications, using the verb
/^{R}tǐ/ 'be (at)'.

Another copula is /tɔ̂ŋ/ 'be named, be priced at'; there is no nega-
tive counterpart. Examples of its use are:

í tɔ̂ŋ jɔ̂	'what (lit. 'who') is your name?'
ń tɔ̂ŋ Kɔ̀ŋ-káì	'my name is Kɔ̀ŋ-káì'
kɛ̀ tɔ̂ŋ sé'èŋ nɛ́í	'this one is thirty cents'
kɛ̀fé mɛ̀ɛ́ tɔ̂ŋ sé'èŋ fè'á	'this pineapple is forty cents'
kɔ̀'ɔ́ pǎì lɔ̀ndɔ́ tɔ̂ŋ sé'èŋ	'one pint (= pound) of rice is
lɔ̀ndɔ́ fóŋ	twenty-five cents'

CHAPTER 10

VERBAL PREDICATIONS

10.1. Verbal predications, including here the expressions for present action mentioned in 9.2 above, are predications which use a verb stem, as opposed to simply a particle or a copula. Verb stems may be formally defined as forms which occur with a particular set of affixes; the individual affixes will be identified along with the description of different verbal constructions in the following sections.

Only one verb stem has been found which ever appears in an utterance in exactly the form that must be used for purposes of lexical identification. This is /táá/ 'go', which by itself constitutes a singular imperative utterance. (For a unique derivation from this stem,see below in this section.) Otherwise, every verb stem must be used either with a suffix or with low tone replacing its stem tone; this tonal replacement is itself considered an affix. It is because of this restriction that verb stems are normally cited, in isolation or in minimal utterances, with low tone, which happens to be characteristic of imperatives with the exception noted above. Tonal contrasts appear, however, in the presence of suffixes. The form used for lexical identification, therefore, must include a tone or tone sequence that appears only when a suffix is used, but not the suffix itself. It is for this reason that, in this study, verb stems with their lexical tones are specially indicated by the preposed symbol ᴿ: e.g., /ᴿfàá/ 'die, kill'. Particularly for native speakers of Vai, it is hoped that this convention will be a reminder that such forms, though not pronounced as written, include essential information about each verb stem.

The vast majority of verb stems have one or two vowels, in the latter case either with or without an intervocalic consonant. The lexical tones, which appear unambiguously before a suffix /-'à/ which is used in the future construction, are either low-high, high(-high), or high-low; roughly the same number of verb stems is recorded with each. No

verb has low(-low) as its stem tone, though as noted above low replaces
the stem tone of all verbs in certain constructions. Following the
principle of maximum differentiation, therefore, it is uses like the
following that establish the forms by which verb stems must be lexical-
ly identified:

ᴿtìέ :   àì kŏŋ tìέ'à   'he's going to cut sticks'

ᴿkúné :   àì mú kúné'à   'he's going to wake us up'

ᴿlέsì :   àì à lέsì'à   'he's going to catch it'

A few verb stems have three vowels. A majority of these have a dou-
ble vowel after the initial consonant, then an intervocalic consonant,
and a final single vowel, with the stem tones high-high-low. Four of
the eight recorded stems certainly are, and the rest may be, adopted
items. These are (with abbreviated glosses in two cases):

ᴿdhɔ́ɔ́nɔ̀   'be slow'   ᴿlúúwù   'inhale steam'

ᴿgέέndὲ   'drag'   ᴿpááwà   'pay'

ᴿkáámà   'stand up'   ᴿsɔ́ɔ́kɔ̀   'push through'

ᴿkpέέsì   'remove'   ᴿtɔ́ɔ́sɔ̀   'suffer a sprain'

Other miscellaneous stems with three vowels are:

ᴿmììnyá   'fear, frighten'   ᴿfàsáì   'interpret'

ᴿkóá'í   'talk'   ᴿjàŋgátà   'punish physically'

ᴿkúmbé'é   'roll'   ᴿlàhí'ì - làjí'ì 'advise'

A very few verb stems are derived by suffixation. One of these is
unique: /ᴿtááyé/ 'walk', from /ᴿtáá/ 'go'; the high tone of /ᴿtáá/, but
not of the suffix, is retained in the imperative form /tááyὲ/. All but
one of the others is derived from a small class of qualificatives (see
10.8 below) by a suffix /-yâà/. The qualificative roots do not appear
in any construction diagnostic for lexical tone, but the derivations
are most simply explained if the tones of the roots are assumed to be
low-high. The known cases are:

ᴿjààyáà   'become spoiled; spoil' (cf. /ᴿjáó/ 'spoil')

ᴿkò'òyáà   'become larger; enlarge, honor'

ᴿlɔ̀ɔ̀yáà   'become smaller'

ᴿkpὲ'ὲyáà   'become harder'

ᴿjànjáà   'become longer, taller; lengthen'

Finally, there are some reduplicated stems, generally referring to extensive or repeated action. For some but not all of these, the unreduplicated stems are also attested:

^{R}kì'ìkí'ì	'get tangled up'	^{R}nììníì	'tickle'
^{R}mààmáà	'move around'	^{R}nyɛ́nyɛ̀	'spread out'
^{R}mù'ìmú'ì	'turn around and around'	^{R}sììsíì	'pile up'
		^{R}tɛ̀ntɛ́ŋ	'mix with the feet'
^{R}nɛ̀ɛ̀nɛ́ɛ̀	'eat slowly and appreciatively'	^{R}tìɛ̀tíɛ̀	'cut in pieces' (object: /...'ɔ̀/)

There are a few instances of nouns related in form and meaning to verbs; the noun and the verb stem are usually homophonous, but in one instance there is a difference in tone. The noun forms are used as objects of the verb /^{R}kɛ́/, which has the meaning 'do, perform' with a number of objects referring to actions; a few of the other nouns used with /^{R}kɛ́/ have cognates which are verbs in other Mande languages, but have no verbal counterparts in Vai. Of the nouns related to verbs, some are used with /^{R}kɛ́/ to express a general meaning (e.g., 'steal'), in contrast with the verb and a specific object (e.g., 'steal a car'). The pattern in question here is not sufficiently common to justify a generalization to the effect that verbs, or transitive verbs, also have nominal usages. At present, it seems preferable to handle the few cases as pairs of separate lexical items. The known instances are the following:

màí 'insulting speech or actions' (cf. /^{R}màí/, trans., 'insult'):
  à'à màí kɛ̀   'he spoke (or acted) insultingly'

kàá 'stealing' (cf. /^{R}kàá/, trans., 'steal'):
  aì kàá kɛ̀   'he steals'

kà'á 'studying, learning' (cf. /^{R}ká'á/, trans., 'study, learn'):
  à bɛ̀ kà'à kɛ́-nà   'he's studying'

gbó'ò 'oath' (cf. /^{R}gbó'ò/, intrans., 'take an oath, swear'; trans., 'curse'): à'à gbó'ò kɛ̀   'he took an oath'

kĭ 'sleeping' (cf. /^{R}kĭ/, intrans., 'sleep'): à'à kĭ kɛ̀
  'he slept'; cf. /^{R}kĭ/ as a verb: ŋ́ kĭ'à bɛ́'ɛnà   'I slept well'

The last of these is also used in an expression referring to state:

à bɛ̀ kĭ 'ɔ̀   'he is asleep' (lit., 'he is in sleep')

By analogy with this, a form /sɔ́/ 'standing' can also be interpreted as
a noun, homophonous with the verb /ᴿsɔ́/ 'stand'; it is similarly used:

à bɛ̀ sɔ́ 'ɔ̀   'he is standing' (i.e., on his feet, not getting
                          to his feet)

Paralleling the verb /ᴿsǐ/ 'sit', however, there is only a nonhomopho-
nous noun /sú/:

à bɛ̀ sú 'ɔ̀   'he is seated'

In many related languages, including other Mande languages, expres-
sions paralleling the above are best treated as a part of the verbal
system, as a "stative" construction used with verbs which may refer to
position.   In Vai, however, it is clearly preferable to treat these as
involving nouns, some of them different from the corresponding verb
stems.   For a different "stative" construction in Vai, see 10.9 below.

Having thus defined and described verb stems, and having excluded
certain forms in certain usages from the verbal system as such, it is
possible to go on to describe the various constructions which function
as verbal predications.   In the following sections, the term "subject"
will refer to a noun or noun phrase, or to a pronoun in its stem form
unless otherwise noted.   In most verbal constructions, the subject is
followed by a "construction marker."   A further detail should be obvi-
ous by now: the object of a verb precedes the verb.

10.2.   The first verbal construction to be considered will be la-
belled "situational."   This construction is used only with intransitive
verbs, many of which are active but some qualificative in meaning.
With a verb indicating action, the situational refers simply to an ac-
tion in the past, with no reference to or implication concerning its
results or its effect on the present.[16]   The statement of action merely
defines the situation at the past time in question.   For example, the
situational predication /ŋ́ kúnɛ́'à/ 'I woke up' is appropriate whether
or not the speaker went back to sleep; it may refer to waking up once,
perhaps because of a noise, or (with further information added) to wa-
king up repeatedly during the night.   By contrast, the "completive"
predication (see 10.7 below) /ná'à kúnɛ̀/ may also be translated 'I woke

up', but with the implication that the speaker stayed awake after that
time; it may also be the equivalent of 'I have waked up' or 'I am
awake'. The distinction is not a full parallel with the English "past"
and "perfect" distinction; the most that can be said is that the situa-
tional never equates with an English "perfect." The exclusion of tran-
sitive verbs from the situational construction reflects the fact that
action upon an object implies a goal or result of the action, which is
foreign to the concept of the situational.

With a verb having qualificative reference, on the other hand, the
situational refers to the present state of affairs; e.g., /kò'á mɛ̀ɛ́
zɛ́nɛ̀'à/ 'this cloth is clean'. A number of qualificatives require this
construction; they constitute a third class of qualificatives in terms
of predicative usage (cf. 9.1,2 above). The attributive counterparts
of qualificatives in this class are in most cases formed with the suf-
fix /-'é/, but in a few cases with /-má/ (cf. 8.1 above).

In the affirmative situational construction, the subject appears im-
mediately before the verb, with no construction marker. The verb stem
has its lexical tones with no alternation, and takes a suffix /-'à/.
As noted in 5.1 above, a stem-final /ŋ/ combines with the initial /'/
of this suffix as an intervocalic /nd/. Examples of the affirmative
situational are:

í kĬ'à kámà	'how did you sleep?'
í bɔ̌'à míá	'where are you from?'
ànú sìí'à	'they sat down, they were seated'
à mà'ó'à	'he was ashamed'
mùsúɛ̌ máì sàmbá'à	'the woman trembled, shivered'
mànjáǎ lŏndà kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ	'the chief entered the house'
kò'áǎ jǎ'à	'the cloth is red'
kàí mɛ̀núú tɔ̀ɔ́'à	'that man is fat'
ŋ́ bá'ó'à	'I got better'
lɔ́ŋ-fèŋɛ̌ bándà	'the food is all gone'
lóndò'lɛ̌ kúnɛ'à lìfíɛ̌ 'ɔ	'the baby woke up during the night'
kò'áǎ kpɛ́'à	'the cloth is white'
kò'áǎ fíndà	'the cloth is black'
kò'áǎ nɔ́ɔ́'à	'the cloth is dirty'
bàànàǎ kɔ́fù'à	'the bananas began to rot'

à kɔ́sù'à   'he coughed'

mɔ̌ɛ̃ nú lásòndà   'the people gathered together'

bó'íɛ̌ kónà'à   'the medicine is bitter'

jíɛ̌ kímà'à   'the water is cold'

lùmbó'ŏɛ̌ ló'à'à   'the orange is sour'

kɔ̌ŋ mɛ̀ɛ́ tândà   'this stick is straight'

In the negative, there is no distinction between the situational and
the completive (10.7 below). The first and second person plural sub-
ject pronouns have alternants with low tone, /mù/ and /wò/; there is a
construction marker /má/; and all verb stems have low tones replacing
their stem tones. The following are negative counterparts of some of
the above:

ŋ́ má kɔ̀sù   'I didn't cough'

mù má kì bɛ́'ɛ̀nà   'we didn't sleep well'

lóndò'ìɛ̌ má kùnɛ̀   'the baby didn't wake up'

bǎ mɛ̀núú má tɔ̀ɔ̀   'that goat isn't fat'

kò'á mɛ̀ɛ́ má nɔ̀ɔ̀   'this cloth isn't dirty'

kɔ̌ŋ mɛ̀ɛ́ má tàŋ   'this stick isn't straight'

10.3. The affirmative "future" construction uses a construction
marker /ì/ after the subject. For convenience rather than on any defi-
nable grounds of linguistic structure, this will be joined to a prece-
ding pronoun subject without space, but written as a separate word af-
ter a noun subject. There is a special alternant with the first person
singular pronoun; the combination of the pronoun and the construction
marker is /mbɛ̀/ (apparently with an unusual initial consonantal /mb/,
not a syllabic nasal before a form homophonous with the copula /bɛ̀/).
There is some evidence that the construction marker may at one time
have had alternants /wɛ̀/ and /yɛ̀/, the first of which might explain the
first person singular combination /mbɛ̀/; perhaps reflecting the second,
after the second person singular pronoun /í/, /ɛ̀/ has occasionally been
heard, but the combination /îì/ is apparently always acceptable. The
first and second person plural pronouns have low tone, /mù/ and /wò/.
The verb stem has its lexical tones with no alternation, and takes a
suffix /-'à/ as in the situational. A commonly used alternative ex-
pression for future action is described in 11.1 below. Examples of the

affirmative future are:

mbɛ̀ à jì'á'à ànú'à	'I'm going to show it to them'
mùì ànú kpà'ó'à	'we're going to look for them'
àì kànyá'à	'he's going to get tired'
ná mùsúɛ̌ ì táá'à Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀	'my wife is going to go to Monrovia'
ànúì à ká'í'à	'they're going to break it'
mbɛ̀ ŋ́ fǎ ké'é'à	'I'll call my father'
mùì féŋ lɔ́ndà	'we're going to eat (things)'
kò'áǎ ì dhɔ́gbɔ̀'à	'the clothes are going to get wet'
àì mànjáǎ súà'à	'he's going to greet the chief'
mbɛ̀ à 'ɔ fá'àndà	'I'm going to change it'
mbɛ̀ à nyíà'à	'I'll fix it'

In the negative of the future, the subject is followed by a con-
struction marker /wé'è/; in the first person singular, the combination
/ŋ́ bé'è/ ([m̄ bé'è]) is sometimes heard as an alternant of /ŋ́ wé'è/. As
in the affirmative, verb stems have their stem tones and take the suf-
fix /-'à/. Examples are:

ŋ́ wé'è kɔ̌ŋ tìɛ́'à	'I'm not going to cut sticks'
à wé'è à kɔ̌ɔ́'à	'he's not going to find it'
ànú wé'è ŋ́ fɛ́'ɛ́'à	'they're not going to see me'
ŋ́ bâ wé'è ná'à	'my mother's not going to come'
à 'ɔ wé'è fá'àndà	'it's not going to change'
mú wé'è à túsà'à	'we're not going to ask him'

10.4. A "conditional" construction is most conveniently considered
next, although it never constitutes a complete predication. It belongs
here, however, because it has a structure comparable to that of the
other constructions treated in this section. A conditional may be
translated by an English clause beginning with either 'when' or 'if',
as long as the reference is to the future; there is no implication as
to the likelihood of the outcome, such as is distinguished by English
'when' (expected) and 'if' (dubious). Affirmative conditions of this
type can actually be expressed in three different ways. The first con-
struction, discussed immediately below, is treated first because of its
parallelism with a negative counterpart. The second is treated at the
end of this section. The third is not a primary verbal construction,

but a subordinate in its internal structure; this, along with other
conditional clauses related to it, is treated in 12.1,2 below.

The first affirmative conditional uses a construction marker /'à/,
written (again for convenience only) without space after a pronoun but
with space after a noun subject which ends with a vowel. Combinations
of pronouns with this construction marker show alternations as noted
below. Verb stems have their stem tones, except that low-high has the
regular alternant low-low before the initial high tone of the following
obligatory suffix. The verbal suffix may have the form /-'êè/ after
any verb. That form is obligatory after transitive verbs, and also af-
ter qualificative intransitive verbs of the class that takes the suffix
/-'é/ in the identificative predicative construction (9.1 above). Af-
ter other intransitive verbs, the suffix of the conditional is optio-
nally /-'é/.

The conditional and the completive (10.7 below) use the same con-
struction marker /'à/, which combines with pronouns according to the
same rules in both constructions. First, with any verb and therefore
in any conditional or completive construction, a set of forms may be
used in which /'à/ is overtly present; the singular pronoun forms pre-
ceding /'à/ have special alternants characterized by the vowel /á/.
This set is as follows:

1s:	ná'à	1pl:	mú'à
2s:	yá'à	2pl:	wó'à
3s:	á'à	3pl:	ànú'à

Independently of the other alternants to be noted, the third person
plural pronoun has an alternant combination with /'à/ which may also be
used with any verb: /ándà/.

Before intransitive verbs only, the singular forms may be used with-
out /'à/ being overtly present, but with the same characteristic /á/ as
above: /ná/, /yá/, and /á/ respectively.

Before transitive verbs only, for the third person singular and the
first and second persons plural, alternants may be used which differ
from the above only in that low tone accompanies the first vowel (which
constitutes a regularity for the third person singular): /à'à/, /mù'à/,
and /wò'à/ respectively.

Affirmative conditionals (with conclusions in the future or impera-

tive to make complete sentences) are illustrated in the following; the
alternants described above are shown for the first few conditions with
intransitive verbs, and later for the first few with transitive verbs:

ná'à jɛ̀'ɛ̀'é, mbɛ̀ í fɛ́'ɛ́'à   'when I return, I'll see you'
   (~ ná ...; ~ ... jɛ̀'ɛ̂'éè, ...)

yá'à tò'é níɛ̀, í ì fɔ̀ ńjè   'if you stay here, tell me'
   (~ yá ...; ~ ... tò'éê ...)

á'à ná'é, àì ŋ́ fǎ fɛ́'ɛ́'à   'if/when he comes, he will see my
   (~ á ...; ~ ... ná'éê, ...)   father'

wó'á táá'é Wààkɔ́'ɔ̀, wó   'when you (pl) go to Robertsport,
   kpààtóó sàŋ ńjè   buy a cutlass for me'

kǎ̀ǎ kɛ́-mɔ̀ɔ̀ mɛ̀núú 'à   'if that thief shows up, chase him
   bó'àndé, í ì kpàì   away'

kò'áǎ 'à dhɔ́gbɔ̀'éè, í ì lɛ̀ŋ   'if the clothes get wet, hang them
   táǎ máì   near the fire'

ná'à à fì'ì'éè, í ì lɛ̀sì   'when I throw it, catch it'

á'à àá jà-fềŋɛ̌ kɔ̀ɔ̀'éè,   'if he finds his money, he will be
   à fà'á ì sá'à   happy'
   (~ à'à ...)

mú'à à lɔ́ndéè, mùì kì'á'à   'if we eat it, we'll get sick'
   (~ mù'à ...)

wó'à ŋ́ kúnɛ́'éè, mú fɛ̀'á wó   'if you (pl) wake me up, I'll go
   wá ì táá'à jí fɛ̀ má-nà   fishing with you'
   (~ wò'à ...)

ànú'à wù'ù-lềŋɛ̌ sɔ́mà'éè,   'if they put the puppy down, he'll
   àì gú'ù'à   run away'

mànjáǎ 'à à já'ì'éè, à fà'á   'if the chief declares him guilty,
   wɛ́'è sá'à   he won't be pleased'

The corresponding negative conditional uses the construction marker
/má/. The first and second person plural pronouns have low tone, /mù/
and /wò/. The same suffix is used as in the affirmative, with the same
rules for the stem tones of verbs. Examples are:

í má ŋ́ fɛ́'ɛ́'éè núú, í má   'if you don't see me there, don't
ŋ́ kɔ̀nɔ̀   wait for me'

à má à kpà'ɔ̀'éè, à wé'è   'if he doesn't look for it, he
à fɛ́'ɛ́'à   won't find it'

mù má tì'é núú, mùì tǐ'à   'if we aren't there, we'll be at
kù'ú 'ɔ̀   home'

sòná má kè'é, mbɛ̀ táá'à   'if it doesn't rain, I'll go to
Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀   Monrovia'

For affirmative conditionals only -- there is no negative counter-
part for this construction -- an alternative construction uses a con-
struction marker /kónì/, and the verb stem has low tone replacing its
stem tone. Alternative formations corresponding to the first three
affirmative examples above are:

ŋ́ kónì jɛ̀'ɛ̀, mbɛ̀ í fɛ́'ɛ́'à   'when I return, I'll see you'
í kónì tò nɛ́ɛ̀, í ì fɔ̀ ńjè   'if you stay here, tell me'
à kónì nà, àì ŋ́ fǎ fɛ́'ɛ́'à   'if/when he comes, he will see
                                       my father'

For another use of /kónì/, see 12.8 below.

10.5. As noted in 9.2 above, the usual expressions for present ac-
tion are, in an important sense, non-verbal predications of the copula-
tive, and specifically locative, type. They do show sufficient simila-
rity to the constructions described above, which use suffixes after the
verb stem, to justify being included at this point; yet even the pat-
tern of suffixation shows a significant difference, at least in an op-
tional usage. An alternative formation noted below, however, using the
same construction markers as are used in the future, further streng-
thens the case for considering a "present" in the context of verbal
predications.

After the copulas /bɛ̀/ and /bé'è/, a verb stem takes a suffix /-nà/.
A hyphen is written between the verb stem and the suffix for two rea-
sons: first, the suffix is also used with verb stems to form what are
clearly compound nouns with a locative meaning; second, a stem-final
/ŋ/ becomes /n/ before this suffix, resulting in a double [n] which
does not occur anywhere else in intervocalic position. Before this

suffix, the verb stem tones high(-high) and high-low are unchanged. The stem tone low-high, however, may be realized in any of three ways, as illustrated in the following alternatives:

$$
\left.\begin{array}{l}
\text{à bὲ kɔ̌ŋ tìɛ́-nà} \\
\text{à bὲ kɔ̌ŋ tìὲ-náà} \\
\text{à bὲ kɔ̀ŋ tíɛ́-nà}
\end{array}\right\} \quad \text{'he's cutting sticks'}
$$

In the first of these, the stem tone of /^{R}tìɛ́/ 'cut' is used with no alternation. The second appears to differ from the first only at the level of a phonologic rule which is regular in ordinary compound nouns, not at the level of a grammatical construction; the choice between the two may well be idiolectal (Fr. Kandakai seems to prefer the second, but recognizes the first as entirely acceptable). The third of the above, however, represents an instance of nominalization (cf. 7.2,3), which points up the grammatical difference between this construction and the verbal predications described in preceding sections.

In the illustrations below, the second of the above formations will be used for verbs with low-high stem tone. This is sufficiently distinctive in print to serve as a reminder that the other two alternatives are also permissible. Examples of the present, therefore, are as follows:

sònáǎ bὲ kè-náà	'it's raining'
pì'ìɛ̌ bὲ bìndà-náà	'the grass is burning'
wù'ù-lêŋɛ̌ bὲ à bâ kpà'ò-náà	'the puppy is looking for its mother'
í bὲ táá-nà míá	'where are you going?'
ŋ́ bὲ táá-nà kùú 'ɔ	'I'm going home'
ŋ́ kŭŋ bὲ ŋ́ lún-nà	'my head aches' ('is hurting me')
à bὲ lɔ́ŋ táá-nà	'she's cooking rice'
à bὲ kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ fí'à-nà	'she's sweeping the house (inside)'
jíɛ̌ bὲ wú'ì-nà	'the water is boiling'
à bé'è bìndà-náà	'it isn't burning'
léŋɛ̌ nú bé'è ná-nà	'the children aren't coming'
à bé'è kò'à lɛ́ɛ̀-nà wɔ̀'ɛ́	'he isn't weaving cloth today'

Not very frequently, and largely in the context of informal conversation, the affirmative future construction marker /ì/ and its negative

counterpart /wé'è/ have been heard instead of the copulas /bɛ̀/ and
/bé'è/, reportedly with no difference in meaning. E.g.,

íì táá-nà míá   'where are you going?'
mbɛ̀ táá-nà kùú 'ɔ̀   'I'm going home'
à wé'è ná-nà   'he isn't coming'

10.6. The verbal constructions described up to this point include
all those that use a suffix after the verb stem. The remaining con-
structions use low tone replacing the stem tone of the verb. The first
of these will be labelled "incompletive." The incompletive uses the
same construction markers as the future: affirmative /ì/ and negative
/wé'è/, with the same alternants of pronouns; it differs from the fu-
ture only in having low tones with the verb stem instead of a suffix
after it. More than one aspectual reference is included in the usages
of the incompletive; in many other languages, two or even three diffe-
rent constructions are required to cover the same range. By itself, an
incompletive predication in Vai is normally interpreted as referring to
customary action. In an appropriate verbal or situational context,
however, the affirmative completive has a hortative significance (sug-
gesting that something should be done); strikingly, the first person
hortative ('let's ...') is expressed not by this construction but by an
imperative (see 10.8 below). For any person, necessity may be ex-
pressed by the incompletive with the added adverb /wákɛ̀/. The negative
incompletive is more restricted to the customary meaning. While it may
be used to express a negative hortative, the preferred construction is
identical with the negative completive and imperative (10.7,8 below).
Other uses of the incompletive are treated in 11.4,5 below. The fol-
lowing are illustrations of the incompletive; for each, the verb stem
used is also shown with its lexical tone:

[R]lɔ́ŋ : mùì lɔ́ŋ kú'úmbà lɔ̀ŋ   'we eat lots of (cooked) rice'
[R]má : àì wúndé mà mú yè   'he cooks (does cooking) for us'
[R]kɛ́ : ɋ́ nyɔ̀mɔ́ ì sɔ̌ kɛ̀   'my brother works in Robertsport'
              Wàà-kɔ́'ɔ̀
[R]tlɛ́ : ànúì kɔ́ŋ tlɛ̀ kpààtóó 'they cut sticks with cutlasses'
              'à
[R]kɛ́ : à wé'è sɔ̌ kɛ̀ nɛ́ɛ̀   'he doesn't work here'

^{R}mɪ̌ :	ŋ́ wé'è kpɛ́ mì	'I don't drink (booze)'
^{R}gú'ù :	ŋ́ fǎ wé'è lùmà-lɛ̀ndɛ̀ gù'ù	'my father doesn't drive (a land vehicle, car)'
^{R}sǎŋ :	á táá'é Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀, àì ká'ì sàŋ	'when/if he goes to Monrovia, he should buy a hoe'
^{R}táá :	àì tàà Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀ sínà	'he should go to Monrovia tomorrow'
^{R}fí'à :	Námá ì kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ̀ fì'à wɔ̀'ɛ́	'Námá should sweep the house today'
^{R}kɔ̀nɔ́ :	ŋ́ má tì'éè núú, ànúì ŋ́ kɔ̀nɔ̀	'if I'm not there, they should wait for me'
^{R}táá :	mùì tàà wákɛ̀	'we have to go'
^{R}táá :	mù má tàà sínà	'let's not go tomorrow'
^{R}kɛ́ :	à má sɔ̌ kɛ̀ sínà	'he shouldn't work tomorrow'

10.7. The "completive" construction uses the same construction markers as the conditional, affirmative /'à/ and negative /má/, but takes low tones with the verb stem instead of a suffix. In the affirmative, combinations of pronouns with the construction marker also have the same alternants as in the conditional, depending on whether the verb is transitive or intransitive; these are fully described in 10.4 above. In the negative, the first and second person plural pronouns again have low tone. It was noted in 10.2 above that the affirmative situational construction is used only with intransitive verbs, and that with verbs referring to action it indicates simply an action in the past, with no implication concerning subsequent results. For intransitive verbs, accordingly, the completive sometimes has a reference like that of the English "perfect"; it may, for example, express the fact that someone 'has gone' somewhere and is still away. The parallelism is by no means complete, however; the completive may also be used to say that someone 'went' somewhere yesterday or at some other time, as long as he has not yet returned. With transitive verbs, the choice between an English "perfect" and "past" in translation is unambiguous only if an appropriate adverb or other information makes the reference clear. Examples of the affirmative completive, with arbitrary choices of translation in some cases, are as follows:

^{R}táá :	á'à tàà Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀ (~ á tàà ...)	'he has gone to Monrovia'

^Rtáá :   á'à tàà Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀   'he went to Monrovia yesterday (and
                kúnù (- á tàà ...)   is still gone)'

^Rjɔ̀ndɔ́ : á'à à jɔ̀ndɔ̀   'he pushed it'
                (- à'à à jɔ̀ndɔ̀)

^Rtlɛ́ :   ànú'à kɔ̀ŋ kú'úmbà   'they (have) cut a lot of sticks
                tlɛ̀ wɔ̀'ɛ́   today'

^Rfɛ́'ɛ́ :   ná'à kò'à lɛ́ɛ̀-fèŋ   'I saw a loom in town'
                fɛ̀'ɛ̀ sànjáǎ 'ɔ̀

^Rkɔ́ɔ́ :   kàí kènúú 'à à kɔ̀ɔ̀   'the other man denied it'

^Rsùndá : ŋ́ fǎ 'à ŋ́ sùndà   'my father sent me'

^Rsɔ́ :   mú'à kéŋ sɔ̀ Gbǎ̀ǎ̀   'we built a house in Gbǎ̀ǎ̀'

^Rlɛ́ɛ̀ :   ŋ́ fǎ 'à kò'á mɛ̀ɛ́   'my father wove this cloth'
                lɛ̀ɛ̀

^Rlûŋ :   ànú'à à tɛ́ lùŋ   'they divided it'

As noted in 10.2 above, the situational uses the same negative con-
struction as the completive. This negative, with all verb stems having
low tones replacing their stem tones, is obviously more closely related
to the affirmative completive than to the affirmative situational. As
will be noted in 10.8 below, the negative imperative, rather surpri-
singly, is also the same. Negatives of intransitive verbs and some
qualificatives, corresponding to affirmative situationals, are illus-
trated in 10.2 above. The following are negatives of transitive verbs,
including some illustrations of negatives with adverbial modifiers
which specify aspects more explicitly:

^Rkì'í :   à má à kì'ì bɛ́'ɛ̀nà   'he didn't tie it well'

^Rkpà'ó : ŋ́ má nyíɛ́ kpà'ò   'I didn't look for fish'

^Rká :   à má àá kɔ̀'ɔ́ kà wɛ́   'he hasn't sold his rice yet'

^Rké'é :   ŋ́ nyɔ̀mɔ́ má ŋ́ kè'è   'my brother didn't call me'

^Rgbáì :   kàíɛ̀ má túsá kɛ́ɛ́   'the man didn't answer the question'
                gbàì

^Rnyíà :   kò'à sɔ́'ɔ́-mɔ̀ɔ̀ɛ̌ má   'the tailor didn't fix it well'
                à nyìà bɛ́'ɛ̀nà

^Rkúnɛ́ :   à má kùnɛ̀ wɛ́   'he hasn't waked up yet'

^Rlɔ́ŋ :   mù má gbàsà lɔ́ŋ   'we've never eaten cassava'
                wɛ́ nì (gbà)

10.8. The "imperative" uses no construction marker before the verb
in the affirmative, but has low tones replacing the stem tones of all
verbs except as noted below. The second person singular pronoun /í/ is
optional in most combinations if singular reference is intended. If
there is a third person singular object pronoun, however, the second
person singular subject pronoun is required. The third person singular
object pronoun has the special alternant /ì/ (rather than the usual
/à/) in the affirmative imperative. The subject pronoun /wó/ is re-
quired for plural reference. In addition, the first person plural pro-
noun /mú/ is used to form what is structurally another imperative, but
with the hortative meaning 'let's ...'.

The one verb /ᴿtáá/ 'go', and the same root, but not the final syl-
lable, in the derived verb stem /ᴿtááyέ/ 'walk', retains its high tones
in the imperative. The singular pronoun in /í táá/ is regular, but the
plural pronouns are low: /wò táá/ 'go (pl)', and /mù táá/ 'let's go'.

Examples of affirmative imperatives are:

ᴿsǎŋ :	(í) nyíέ mὲέ sàŋ	'buy this fish'
ᴿná :	(í) nà níὲ	'come here'
ᴿfí'à :	(í) kéŋě 'ɔ fì'à	'sweep the house (inside)'
ᴿmá :	í ì mà wɔ'έ	'do it today'
ᴿkpà'ó :	í ì kpà'ò	'look for it/him/her'
ᴿké'é :	í ì kè'è	'call him/her'
ᴿtìέ :	wó kɔ̌ŋ tìὲ	'cut (pl) sticks'
ᴿgbέsὲ :	wó gbὲsὲ	'get out of the way (pl)'
ᴿsìí :	mú sìì	'let's sit down'
ᴿsúmá :	mú ì sùmà	'let's measure/weigh it'
ᴿkɔnɔ́ :	mú í nyɔ̀mɔ́ kɔ̀nɔ̀	'let's wait for your brother'
ᴿtáá :	mù táá núú sínà	'let's go there tomorrow'

For the negative imperative, the construction marker is /má/ (with
the first and second person plural pronouns having low tone), and all
verb stems take low tone. The second person singular pronoun may not
be omitted. With a subject other than second person, the same con-
struction has a negative hortative meaning (cf. the incompletive, 10.6
above). The negative imperative is thus identical in form with the ne-
gative completive (10.7 above). Even a distinctive verbal context to
resolve the ambiguity does not appear to be a common device. Apparent-

ly the situational context -- merely whether the hearer for one reason
or another expects to hear a statement or a command -- is more impor-
tant. Examples of negative imperatives, with their extension to the
negative hortative usage, are as follows:

^Rtáá :	í má tàà núú	'don't (/you didn't) go there'
^Rsǎŋ :	í má kò'á mɛ̀núú sàŋ	'don't buy that cloth'
^Rké'é :	í má ànú kè'è	'don't call them'
^Rké'é :	wò má wó fǎ kè'è	'don't (pl) call your father'
^Rmá :	wò má à mà	'don't (pl) do it'
^Rná :	mù má nà níɛ̀ sínà	'let's not come here tomorrow'
^Rlǒŋ :	mù má lòŋ kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ	'let's not go in the house'
^Rkɔ̀nɔ́ :	ànú má ŋ́ kɔ̀nɔ̀	'they shouldn't wait for me'
^Rkɛ́ :	à má sɔ̌ kɛ̀ sínà	'he shouldn't work tomorrow'
^Rpááwà :	à má sɔ̀ kɛ́'éè bɛ́'ɛ̀-	'if he doesn't work well, they
	nà, ànú má à pááwà	'shouldn't pay him'
^Rjì'á :	ŋ́ má à jì'à à 'à?	'shouldn't I show it to him?'
^Rsɔ́'ɔ́ :	kò'à sɔ́'ɔ́-mɔ̀ɔ̀ɛ̌ má	'the tailor shouldn't sew it with
	à sɔ̀'ɔ̀ fàndé	that thread'
	mɛ̀núú 'à	
^Rkpàsí :	léŋɛ̌ nú má wù'úɛ̌	'the children shouldn't beat the
	kpàsì	dog'

10.9. Two known verbs which require verbal complements (described
in 11 below), and a small number of qualificatives, are used in a "sta-
tive" construction. Like the imperative, the affirmative stative has
no construction marker, and has low tones with all verb stems. It dif-
fers from the imperative, however, in that the subject is not restric-
ted to one of three pronouns. Nor can the subject be tortuously inter-
preted as the object of an imperative, since it cannot be preceded by a
pronoun like the subject pronoun of an imperative. The qualificatives
used in the stative construction constitute a fourth class in terms of
predicative usages; for the others, see 9.1,2 and 10.2 above. In addi-
tion to five recorded cases that are entirely regular, there are three
which are included here although their tones are not low throughout;
alternative usages are attested for all three, and these may perhaps be
apocopated constructions. The attributives corresponding to some of
these are completely unrelated.

The negative stative, like the negative situational and imperative, is identical with the negative completive (cf. 10.2,7,8 above).

The verbs used in the first two examples below differ in meaning in that /^{R}kòsá/ refers to learned or acquired ability, while /^{R}kúŋ/ implies native ability and often opportunity. The lexical tones of many of the qualificatives cannot be determined; they have been recorded only in this construction, and perhaps do not occur in other constructions in which their lexical tones would be expected to occur. All forms recorded in the stative are included in the following:

à kòsà wúndé má'à   'he can cook' ('do cooking')

ó kùŋ ná kɔ'ɔ̃ɛ̃ gbí ká'à   'I can sell all my rice'

kéŋɛ̌ kò'ò   'the house is large'

  (cf.: kéŋ-bà 'a large house')

kí'àǎ bú kò'ò   'the road is wide'

  (cf.: kí'à bú kò'òyáà'é 'a wide road')

kéŋɛ̌ lɔ̀ɔ̀   'the house is small'

  (cf.: kéŋ-lèŋ 'a small house')

kí'àǎ bú lɔ̀ɔ̀   'the road is narrow'

  (cf.: kí'à bú lɔ̀ɔ̀yáà'é 'a narrow road')

kàíɛ̌ jàŋ   'the man is tall'

  (cf.: kàí nyàmá 'a tall man')

kɔ̆ŋɛ̌ 'ɔ kpɛ̀'ɛ̀   'the wood is hard'

  (cf.: kɔ̆ndɔ̀ kpɛ̀'ɛ̀'é 'hard wood')

kéŋɛ̌ nyì   'the house is fine'

  (cf.: kéŋ nyíà'é, kéŋ bɛ́'ɛ̀nà 'a fine house')

kí'àǎ jáò ~ kí'àǎ jáó'é mù   'the road is bad'

  (cf.: kí'à nyámá 'a bad road')

kí'àǎ námàà ~ kí'àǎ námàà'é mù   'the road is slippery'

  (cf.: kí'à námàà'é 'a slippery road')

à fànyá ~ à fànyáà'é mù   'it is heavy'

  (cf.: kàǎ fànyáà'é 'a heavy box')

ó fǎ má kòsà lèndɛ̀ gú'ù'à   'my father can't drive'

kéŋɛ̌ má kò'ò   'the house isn't large'

kɔ̆ŋɛ̌ 'ɔ má kpɛ̀'ɛ̀   'the wood isn't hard'

10.10. The verbal predications described above are summarized in the chart below, which presents them in a different order but reveals

more of the degree of symmetry in the system. In the chart, "S" stands
for "subject"; subscript numerals refer to alternant forms of pronouns
described in the appropriate sections above. "O" stands for "object,"
which is not permitted with some verbs, is required with others, and is
optional with some (i.e., such verbs may be used either intransitively
or transitively); the "O" is therefore parenthesized. "VS" is "verb
stem." "$\emptyset$" stands for the absence of a construction marker, or "zero."
"L", written as if it were a suffix, stands for low tones replacing the
stem tones of any verb. Otherwise, construction markers and verbal
suffixes appear in their actual forms. The special optional tonal al-
ternation for low-high stems in the present (10.5 above) is not noted
in the chart.

	Affirmative			Negative		
Situational:	S	$\emptyset$	--- VS-'à	(= Completive)		
Stative:	S	$\emptyset$	--- VS-L	(= Completive)		
Imperative:	S	$\emptyset$	(O) VS-L	(= Completive)		
Future:	S_1	ì	(O) VS-'à	S	wé'è	(O) VS-'a
Incompletive:	S_1	ì	(O) VS-L	S	wé'è	(O) VS-L
Conditional:	S_2	'à	(O) VS-'éè	S_1	má	(O) VS-'éè
(or:	S	kónì	(O) VS-L		---	)
Completive:	S_2	'à	(O) VS-L	S_1	má	(O) VS-L
Present:	S	bè	(O) VS-nà	S	bé'è	(O) VS-nà

VERB AND SENTENCE COMPLEMENTS

11.1.   A number of verbs permit or require the use of a complement
(an object in a few cases, but primarily a post-verbal construction)
which includes another verb. One of the commonest combinations is an
alternative expression for future action. The present of the verb
/^{R}ná/ 'come' is used, followed by another verb which also takes the
suffix /-nà/ and which may be in a nominalized form (cf. 10.5 above).
There is no implication of actual motion toward the speaker, any more
than English 'he's going to do it' implies motion away from the spea-
ker. Examples of this alternative future are:

ŋ́ bὲ ná-nà táá-nà	'I'm going to go'
à bὲ ná-nà kéŋ só-nà	'he's going to build a house'
ŋ́ bâ bὲ ná-nà kò'á mὲέ bótì-nà	'my mother is going to wring out these clothes'
ànú bὲ ná-nà à kì'ì-náá	'they're going to tie it'

The same construction is used after the verb /^{R}táá/ 'go' in senten-
ces like the following, but in this case with the implication of motion
away from the speaker, and to express purpose. The present and situa-
tional of /^{R}táá/ are used here; with other constructions, purpose is
expressed by the incompletive (see 11.5 below).

ŋ́ bὲ táá-nà jí fὲ má-nà	'I'm going (i.e., I'm on my way) to go fishing'
à táá'à kùú 'ɔ lɔ́ŋ táá-nà	'she went home to cook rice'

Another usage of this complement construction is after the verb
/^{R}tŏ/ 'stay, continue', primarily if not exclusively in the situational
and future constructions:

sònáǎ tŏ'à kè-náà lìfí gbù'ù	'it kept on raining all night'
sònáǎ ì tŏ'à kè-náà té'é kpὲ'ὲŋ	'it's going to keep on raining all day'

Finally, such complements are used after the verbs /^{R}fέ'έ/ 'see',
/^{R}jémbέ/ 'watch', and /^{R}láŋ/ 'hear'. The subject of the action re-
ferred to in the complement is expressed by an object of /^{R}fέ'έ/ or
/^{R}jémbέ/, but by the possessor of the obligatory relational noun object
/kú'ὲ/ 'voice, sound' with /^{R}láŋ/. (For another usage with /^{R}láŋ/, see
11.3 below.) Examples are:

ná'à ànú fὲ'ὲ sɔ̀ kέ-nà	'I saw them working'
á'à Námá fὲ'ὲ ná-nà	'he saw Námá coming'
wòì ŋ́ fέ'έ'à ná-nà	'you (pl) will see me coming'
mú'à ànú jὲmbὲ à má-nà	'we watched them do(ing) it'
mbὲ à jémbέ'à kò'à lέὲ-nà	'I'm going to watch him weave'
ná'à ànú kú'ὲ làŋ lɔ̀ŋ bɔ́-nà	'I heard them singing'

11.2.   After the verbs /^{R}kúŋ/ 'be able', /^{R}kòsá/ 'have the ability',
/^{R}bûŋ/ 'start', /^{R}kò'ó/ 'stop', /^{R}báŋ/ 'finish', and perhaps some
others (but see 11.3 below for another expression meaning 'start'), the
verbal complement is a verb stem with the suffix /-'à/. The first two
of these verbs have been illustrated in the stative (10.9 above); they
are also used in other constructions as appropriate. E.g.,

ŋ́ kùŋ à má'à í yὲ	'I can do it for you'
àì kúndà à má'à sínà	'he'll be able to do it tomorrow'
Músá kúndà kǎǎ kέ-mɔ̀ɔ̀ɛ̆ bì'á'à	'Músá was able to catch the thief'
ŋ́ kúndà kǎǎ fànyáà'é bí'à	'I used to be able to pick up heavy boxes'
à kòsà kɔ̀ɔ̀wà nyíà'é nyíà'à	'he can make fine shoes'
ŋ́ má kòsà lὲndé mὲέ gú'ù'à	'I can't drive this car'
sònáǎ bûndà kɛ̆'à lìfí 'ɔ̀	'it started to rain during the night'
àì bùŋ sɔ̆ mὲέ kέ'à sínà	'he should start doing this work tomorrow'
á'à kò'ò sɔ̀ kέ'à	'he stopped working'
í má kò'ò à kpà'ó'à	'don't stop looking for it'
á'à bàŋ sɔ̆ mὲnúú kέ'à	'he finished doing that job'
yá'à bándéὲ sóóɛ̆ sěndà, í ì fɔ̀ ńjὲ	'when you finish digging the hole, tell me'

mbὲ bándà à máʼà sínà   'I'll finish doing it tomorrow'
à kúndà bándà àá sɔ̀ kɛʼà   'he was able to finish (doing) his
kúnù   work yesterday'

11.3.   A few verbs may be used with objects which are relational
nouns, the "possessor" of which may be a nominalized verbal expression.
For example, the combination of the relational noun /kùʼú/ 'bottom,
base' and the verb /^{R}bí/ 'pick up' means 'start' (cf. /^{R}bṵ̂/ in 11.2
above).   The verb /^{R}lá̰/ 'hear' requires the relational noun /kúʼὲ/
'voice, sound' as its object.   The next-to-last example below is an al-
ternative for the last example in 11.1 above, in which 'them' is the
immediate source of the sound; the last example below, however, can be
expressed only in this way, since the source of the sound is the in-
strument, not the person.   Preceding the relational noun in each of the
following is a nominalized verb, which itself may have an object:

áʼà wóʼà kùʼú bì   'he started to undress'

áʼà sɔ̌ mὲɛ́ kɛ́ kùʼú bì kúnù   'he started doing this work yes-
                                           terday'

àì sɔ̌ mὲɛ́ kɛ́ kùʼù bíʼà sínà   'he's going to start doing this
                                           work tomorrow'

náʼà ànúá lɔ̰̀ bɔ́ kúʼὲ lá̰   'I heard them singing'

ŋ̀ wòʼóʼà mbὲ àá kɔ́nḭ́ɡàì   'I want to hear him play his
sḛ́ kúʼὲ lá̰   framed lute'

11.4.   A number of verbs (of which /^{R}wòʼó/ 'want' in the last illus-
tration above is an example) are followed by sentence complements con-
sisting of an incompletive construction.   After a negated verb, the in-
completive requires the morpheme /tò/ after the construction marker;
alternatively, /tò/ is sometimes used in place of the normal construc-
tion marker.   In most of these combinations, the incompletive comple-
ment has something of a hortative or purposive significance, which is,
as noted in 10.6 above, a possible meaning of the incompletive con-
struction alone.

The verbs that take incompletive complements may be divided into
groups in terms of other characteristics of their usage.   The first
group consists of three intransitive verbs: /^{R}wòʼó/ 'want', /^{R}láó/
'agree, permit', and /^{R}gá̰ɡà/ 'refuse, forbid'.   It may seem surprising

that a verb with a meaning such as 'want' would be intransitive; even
in other Mande languages, verbs with a comparable meaning are usually
transitive. In Vai, however, /ᴿwò'ó/ has more of the sense of 'have a
desire'; even a physical object which is wanted is expressed by a noun
phrase complement using the relational particle /'à/, as in /ŋ́ wò'ó'à
nyíɛ́ 'à/ 'I want fish.' In the situational construction, /ᴿwò'ó/ re-
fers to the present time unless the complement includes a reference to
past time; the past may also be expressed by the adverb /wì/. It is
useful to compare the sentence complements in question here with those
in other Niger-Congo languages. In languages which have a grammatical
infinitive, it is the infinitive which is used if the subject of the
complement verb is the same as the subject of the main verb, as in
equivalents of sentences like 'I want to do it.' If the subjects are
different, however, a hortative construction is used in the complement,
as 'I want he should do it.' In Vai, however, as in many related lan-
guages, there is no grammatical infinitive. Accordingly, all such sen-
tence complements are hortative, including 'I want I should do it.' In
most if not all of the following examples, a conjunction /kɛ̀mú/ 'that,
in order that' is permissible before the complement, but not required;
it appears to be more commonly used in fairly long sentences. Examples
of incompletive complements with the three verbs under consideration
here are as follows:

à wò'ó'à àì tàà kùú 'ɔ	'he wants to go home'
à wò'ó'à wì àì tàà kùú 'ɔ	'he wanted to go home'
ŋ́ má wò'ò mbɛ̀ tò sɔ̌ mɛ̀ɛ́ kɛ̀	'I don't want to do this work'
(~ ŋ́ má wò'ò ŋ́ tò sɔ̌ mɛ̀ɛ́ kɛ̀)	
ànúì wò'ó'à ànúì à gbí lɔ̀ŋ	'they'll want to eat it all'
ŋ́ wò'ó'à íì ná kɔ̀'ɔ̌ɛ sàŋ	'I want you to buy my rice'
ŋ́ wò'ó'à íì tàà kúnù	'I wanted you to go yesterday'
à wò'ó'à ànúì à pààwà	'he wants them to pay him'
ànú fǎ má wò'ò (kɛ̀mú) ànúì tò tàà kà'à kɔ́'ɔ	'their father doesn't want them to go to school'
à láó'à àì à mà	'he agreed to do it'
à má làò (kɛ̀mú) àì tò àá kɔ̀'ɔ̌ɛ sàŋ mú bà'à	'he didn't agree to sell his rice to us'
à má làò (kɛ̀mú) mùì tò àá	'he didn't allow us to buy his

kɔ'ɔɛ̌ sàŋ   rice'

àì làò àá léŋɛ̌ nú ì nà níɛ̀   'he lets his children come here
  té'é 'ɔ̀   during the day'

à wé'ɛ̀ làò àá léŋɛ̌ nú ì tò   'he doesn't let his children come
  nà níɛ̀   here'

à gáŋgà'à àì à mà   'he refused to do it'

àì gáŋgà'à àì à mà   'he'll refuse to do it'

ŋ́ má gàŋgà mbɛ̀ tò à mà   'I didn't refuse to do it'

àì gàŋgà (kɛ̀mú) àá léŋɛ̌ nú   'he forbids (/should forbid) his
  ì tàà núú   children to go there'

à gáŋgà'à (kɛ̀mú) mùì àá   'he refused to let us buy his car'
  lùmà-lɛ̀ndɛ̀ sàŋ

í má gàŋgà ànúì tò nà   'don't forbid them to come'

Secondly, incompletive complements are used after the verbs /ᴿbhɔɔ́/
'beg' and /ᴿlàhí'ì/ (or /ᴿlàjí'ì/) 'advise'. These, however, also re-
quire a personal object, with the same reference as the subject of the
complement. A similar case is the phrase /tú ᴿsá/ 'ask', in which /tú/
is a relational noun which requires a personal possessor. The form
/ᴿlàhí'ì/ is also used as a noun in the phrase /làhí'ì ᴿbí/ 'make a
promise, promise', which may also take an incompletive complement. Ex-
amples of these are:

à'à ŋ́ bhɔɔ̀ mbɛ̀ à mà   'he begged me to do it'

à'à ŋ́ bhɔɔ̀ m̀ má à mà   'he begged me not to do it'

mbɛ̀ à bhɔɔ́'à àì nà   'I'm going to beg him to come'

bó'í-zòòɛ̌ 'à à làhì'ì   'the doctor advised him to eat
  (kɛ̀mú) àì sùɛ̀ kú'úmbà lɔ̀ŋ   a lot of meat'

mú'à ànú làhì'ì (kɛ̀mú)   'we advised them to go to a doctor'
  ànúì tàà bò'ì-zòò bà'à

mànjáǎ 'à ŋ́ tú sà mbɛ̀ nà   'the chief asked me to come'

í ì tú sà àì í bàsà   'ask him to help you'

ŋ́ má à tú sà àì tò à sàŋ   'I didn't ask him to buy it'

à'à làhí'ì bì àì tàà sínà   'he promised to go tomorrow'

mbɛ̀ làhí'ì bí'à mbɛ̀ à mà   'I (will) promise to do it'

A third group of verbs after which incompletive complements are per-
mitted, though not required, take a third person singular pronoun ob-

ject interpreted as impersonal, 'it', anticipating the sentence comple-
ment. The transitive verb /^{R}súmá/ ordinarily means 'measure, weigh';
with the relational noun object /'ɔ/ 'inside' it means 'test, try' (the
possessor of /'ɔ/). With either a third person pronoun alone or with
/à 'ɔ/ 'its inside' as object, and with an incompletive complement, it
means 'try, attempt (to)'. Similarly, with only an object the verb
/^{R}líà/ means 'like, enjoy, love'; used in the future, with the object
/à/ and an incompletive complement, it has the force of 'would like
to'. The verb /^{R}má/ is the common verb meaning 'do'; with the object
/à/ and an incompletive complement, it means 'force, compel'. Examples
of these three verbs with incompletive complements are:

mbɛ̀ à súmá'à mbɛ̀ à mà	'I'll try to do it'
í ì sùmà íì à nyìà wɔ'ɛ́	'try to fix it today'
í ì sùmà íì nà sé'ɛ̀ŋ tânda	'try to bring two dollars'
mbɛ̀ à líà'à àì sɔ̌ kɛ̀ ńjè	'I'd like him to work for me'
ŋ́ nyɔmɔ́ ì à líà'à àì tàà	'my brother would like to go to
kà'à kɔ́'ɔ	school'
á'à à mà mùì àá fóófóóɛ̌ bì	'he made us carry his loads'
í má à mà mbɛ̀ tò à mà	'don't make me do it'
ŋ́ wé'è à má'à íì tò tàà núú	'I won't make you go there'

Finally, the verb /^{R}fɔ́/ 'say' is commonly used with an incompletive
complement. It also requires an anticipatory object 'it', and in addi-
tion may have a complement with the relational particle /yè/, indica-
ting the person addressed. Thus:

á'à à fɔ̀ mùì nà	'he said we should come'
á'à à fɔ̀ mú yè mùì nà	'he told us to come'
í ì fɔ̀ à yè àì ná bhùɛ̌ nyìà	'tell him to fix my gun'
àì à fɔ̀ ànú yè ànú má à 'ɔ	'he should tell them not to change
fà'àŋ	it'
kà'àmɔ́ɔ̌ɛ̌ 'à à fɔ̀ ńjè	'the teacher told me that the
léŋɛ̌ nú ì nà sínà	children should come tomorrow'

11.5. In a much less restricted way, the incompletive construction,
with more of its hortative than its customary significance, may be used
after a wide variety of verbal predications. This is the usual way of
expressing purpose; after an incompletive, a future, or an imperative,

however, there is no very sharp line of demarcation between purpose and
what is merely a potential subsequent action. Purpose can be unambigu-
ously expressed by using the conjunction /kɛ̀mú/. These usages are ne-
vertheless included here, rather than under the heading of subordinate
clauses (12 below), because the incompletive often follows another verb
without a conjunction, and even without a pause (which would be indica-
ted by a comma, representing pause intonation). In this respect, the
incompletive constructions in the following examples are more like sen-
tence complements, or even like coordinate clauses similar to "consecu-
tive" constructions in many other languages. Thus:

á'à tàà àà sɛ̀nɛ́ɛ̌ 'ɔ̀ àì sɔ̌ kɛ̀	'he went to his farm to work'
ná'à nà níɛ̀ (kɛ̀mú) mbɛ̀ í fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'I came here to see you'
mbɛ̀ táá'à kùú 'ɔ̀ mbɛ̀ kpò'ó nyɛ̀ì	'I'm going to go home and (/to) write a letter'
àì í bàsà íì à mà	'he should help you do it'
í ì bàsà àì à mà	'help him do it'
à bɛ̀ sɔ̌ kɛ́-nà (kɛ̀mú) àì tàà kà'à kɔ́'ɔ̀	'he's working in order to go to school'
àì nà níɛ̀ sààmà 'à àì sɔ̌ kɛ̀ mú yè	'he comes here in the morning and works (/to work) for us'

11.6. There is one recorded instance of a completive construction
functioning like a sentence complement; this is after the verb /ᴿbàsá/
'help' when it also appears in the completive. This is somewhat simi-
lar to some of the above examples, which can be interpreted as paratac-
tic and coordinate. Other coordinate clauses which may be paratacti-
cally joined, however, may alternatively be joined by a coordinating
conjunction; these are discussed in 14 below. An example of a comple-
ment-like completive is the following:

á'à ŋ̀ bàsà ná'à à mà	'he helped me do it' (lit., 'he helped me I did it')

11.7. It is highly unlikely that the foregoing discussion of verb
and sentence complements (particularly 11.1-4, 6) has included an ex-
haustive list of the Vai verbs that take such complements. What is

likely, however, is that there are no other types of complements used
with other verbs. It may further be added that Vai equivalents of a
few other English verbs that one might expect to be included here pro-
vide no new information. For example, the common expressions for 'suc-
ceed' and 'fail' are merely the appropriate affirmative and negative
constructions with the verb /^{R}kúŋ/ 'be able' (see 11.2 above).

CHAPTER 12
SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

12.1.   An affirmative and a negative conditional construction, and
an alternative for the affirmative, were described in 10.4 above.
These share the general characteristics of independent verbal predica-
tions, but do not constitute complete sentences; they are by defini-
tion a type of subordinate clause.   As noted there, such conditionals
may correspond to English clauses beginning with either 'when' or 'if';
there is no implication as to whether the action or situation referred
to is expected or in doubt.   Conditions implying doubt ('if') are al-
ternatively expressed, however, by clauses beginning with a conjunction
/hǐí/, which appears to have been adopted from Mende; such clauses also
permit a wider variety of aspectual reference.   In the clauses which
parallel the conditional construction most closely in meaning, the re-
ference is to something that has not as yet taken place; yet these
clauses use the situational construction with intransitive verbs, and
the completive with transitive verbs (cf. 10.2,7 above).   Other predi-
cations, both nonverbal and verbal, may also be used after /hǐí/ with
the aspectual implications peculiar to them (e.g., customary, future,
stative).   E.g.,

hǐí à táá'à núú,
   à wé'è jè'ɛ́'à
	'if he goes there, he won't come
	   back'

hǐí í bó'ó mà wɔ́nyɛ́'à,
   í má à wɔ̀nyɛ̀
	'if your arm (surface) itches,
	   don't scratch it'

hǐí à bú'ɔ bɔ́'à,
   àì bó'í mɛ̀ɛ́ mì
	'if he gets diarrhoea (lit. 'if his
	   stomach comes out'), he should
	   take (lit. 'drink') this medicine'

hǐí à bú'ɔ bɛ̀ bɔ́-nà,
   àì bó'í mɛ̀ɛ́ mì
	'if he has diarrhoea, he should
	   take this medicine' (/hǐí/ with
	   present)

hìí à'à àá kɔ'ɔ̌ɛ kà,   'if he sells his rice, he will have
  àì jà-fêŋ fɛ'ɛ'à   (lit. 'see') money'

hìí ná'à yá léŋɛ̌ nú fɛ'ɛ̀,   'if I see your children, I'll tell
  mbɛ̀ à fɔ́'à ànú yè ànúì nà   them to come'

hìí í bâ 'à à tàà,   'if your mother cooks it, I'll eat
  mbɛ̀ à lɔ́ndà   it'

hìí ànú bɛ̀ ná-nà jòwó sàn-   'if they're going to buy sweet po-
  náà, í ì fɔ̀ ànú yè ànúì   tatoes, tell them to buy some for
  bɔ́ɔ̆ sàŋ ŋ́ pɛ́'ɛ́ ŋ́jè   me too'

hìí tɔ̀ɔnyáà mù, í má à kòò   'if it's true, don't deny it'

hìí ŋ́ kùŋ bándà kpò'ó mɛ̀ɛ́   'if I can finish writing this book,
  nyɛ̀ì'à, ŋ́ fà'á ì sá'à   I'll be happy'

hìí ànú má táá wɔ'ɛ́,   'if they don't go today, they'll go
  ànúì táá'à sínà   tomorrow'

hìí ŋ́ má kì'à,   'if I don't get sick, I'll come
  mbɛ̀ ná'à nìɛ̀ sínà   here tomorrow'

hìí à má àá kɔ'ɔ̌ɛ kà,   'if he doesn't sell his rice, he
  à wé'è jà-fêŋ fɛ'ɛ'à   won't have money'

hìí í má à sùmà íì à mà,   'if you don't try to do it, I won't
  ŋ́ wé'è í bàsá'à   help you'

hìí à má nà sàànà,   'if he doesn't come soon, I'm not
  ŋ́ wé'è à kɔ̀nɔ́'à   going to wait for him'

hìí tɔ̀ɔnyáà máà, í ì fɔ̀ ŋ́jè 'if it isn't true, tell me'

12.2. Hypothetical conditions are also introduced by the conjunc-
tion /hìí/, but in addition require the adverb /wì/. If the condition
refers to the future ('if it should happen'), /wì/ follows /hìí/ di-
rectly, and the verbal construction in the conditional clause is a fu-
ture. If the condition refers to the present or past (i.e., as contra-
ry to fact, 'if it were true,' 'if it had happened'), /wì/ follows the
verb or copula or identifier, and any appropriate construction can be
used in the condition with its own aspectual reference. After all such
conditional clauses, the conclusion uses a future construction, even if

the condition requires a reference to past time. Examples of such hy-
pothetical conditions are:

hìí wì íì táá'à Jòndú,
    íì ŋ̀ fǎ fɛ́'ɛ̀'à
	'if you should go to Jòndú,
	    you would meet my father'

hìí wì kàí mɛ̀núú ì àá sɔ̀
    kɛ́'à, àì jà-fêŋ fɛ́'ɛ̀'à
	'if that man would do his work,
	    he'd have money'

hìí í táá'à wì Jòndú,
    íì ŋ̀ fǎ fɛ́'ɛ̀'à
	'if you had gone to Jòndú,
	    you'd have met my father'

hìí í tǐ'à wì níɛ̀,
    ŋ̀ nyɔ̀mɔ́ wé'è fàá'à
	'if you had been here, my brother
	    would not have died'

hìí ná'à ànú fɛ̀'ɛ̀ wì,
    mbɛ̀ à fɔ́'à í yè
	'if I had seen them,
	    I'd have told you'

hìí ŋ̀ má à kè'è wì,
    à wé'è ná'à
	'if I hadn't called him,
	    he wouldn't have come'

hìí à bɛ̀ wì sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà wɔ̀'ɛ́,
    mbɛ̀ kúndà à ké'é'à
	'if he were working today,
	    I could call him'

hìí à bé'è wì sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà, mùì
    kúndà táá'à jí fɛ̀ má-nà
	'if he weren't working, we
	    could go fishing'

hìí à má tì wì sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà,
    mùì kúndà táá'à jí fɛ̀ má-nà
	'if he hadn't been working,
	    we could have gone fishing'

hìí tɔ̀ɔ̀nyáà máà wì,
    mbɛ̀ à fɔ́'à wó yè
	'if it weren't true, I would tell
	    (/have told) you (pl)'

12.3. Propositions after the equivalents of English verbs such as
'say', 'think', 'know', etc. (i.e., clauses of indirect discourse) are
ordinary predications introduced by the conjunction /kɛ̀/ 'that' (which
is quite possibly also the first part of the conjunction /kɛ̀mú/ 'in or-
der that'). Some of the common expressions introducing such clauses,
however, deserve explanatory notes. Only the last of the following is
an ordinary intransitive verb:

á'à à fɔ̀ kɛ̀ ...	'he said (it) that ...'
á'à à sɔ̀ kɛ̀ ...	'he knows (/knew) (it) that ...'
á'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀ kɛ̀ ...	'he saw (/learned) (it) that ...'

à jí'ì bὲ kὲ ...	'he thinks (/thought) that ...'
	(lit. 'his mind is-at that ...')
á'à jí'ì sìì à mà kὲ ...	'he remembered that ...' (lit. 'he
	set mind on it that ...')
á'à nyìnà kὲ ...	'he forgot (/has forgotten)
	that ...'

Examples of these with predications after them are:

á'à à fɔ̀ kὲ à bὲ ná-nà à má-nà sínà	'he said that he's going to (/would) do it tomorrow'
ànú'à à fɔ̀ ɲ́jè kὲ mɔ̀ bɔ́ɔ̌ bὲ kéŋɛ̌ lá	'they told me that someone is (/was) at the door'
léŋɛ̌ nú bâ 'à à sɔ̀ kὲ ànú bὲ kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ̀	'the children's mother knew that they were (/ knows that they are) in the house'
léŋɛ̌ nú bâ 'à à sɔ̀ kὲ ànú tǐ'à kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ̀	'the children's mother knew that they had been in the house'
ná'à à sɔ̀ kὲ tɔ̀ɔnyáà mù	'I know it's true'
íì à fɛ́'ɛ́'à kὲ tɔ̀ɔnyáà mù	'you'll learn that it's true'
ná'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀ kúnù kὲ í líámɔ́ ì ná'à	'I learned yesterday that your friend was (/is) going to come'
ɲ́ jí'ì bὲ kὲ kɔ̀'ɔ́ pǎ̃ì lɔ̀ndɔ́ tɔ̃ŋ sé'èŋ fóŋ	'I think that rice is twenty-five cents a pint'
ɲ́ jí'ì tǐ'à kὲ sɔ̀ kɛ́ mὲɛ́ kpὲ'ὲ	'I used to think that this work was hard'
à má jí'ì sìì à mà kὲ ná'à à pàǎwà	'he didn't remember that I had paid him'
ànú wé'è jí'ì sìì à mà kὲ ɲ́ kɔ́'ɔ̀ má kpὲ'ὲ	'they don't remember that my back isn't strong'
ná'à nyìnà kὲ à bὲ níɛ̀	'I forgot that he was here'
ɲ́ má kùŋ nyìná'à kὲ wó'à ɲ́ bàsà ɲ́ táá'à kà'à kɔ́'ɔ̀	'I can't forget that you (pl) helped me to go to school'

12.4. Subordinate clauses expressing cause are introduced by one of
two conjunctive phrases, /kpàndá mâà/ and /bɛ́í mâà/. The word /kpàndá/
by itself means 'for nothing, in vain, with nothing added'; it is a
qualificative used predicatively in the identificative construction
(see 9.1 above). The phrase /kpàndá mâà/ thus has the basic meaning of
'it is not without reason'; it functions as a complete clause or per-
haps even as an independent sentence, rather than as what is typically
thought of as a conjunction. The phrase /bɛ́í mâà/ is probably similar
in its etymology, though /bɛ́í/ by itself has not been identified; it is
at least similar in its grammatical function. It is worth noting that
some other Mande languages have conjunctive expressions with comparable
etymologies and functions. Examples of these, incorporating a sugges-
tion that they be written at least with a comma preceding and following
them to show that they are independent predications in themselves, are
as follows:

ŋ́ bɛ̀ sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà, kpàndá mâà, 'I'm working because I want to go
 ŋ́ wò'ó'à mbɛ̀ tàà kà'à kɔ́'ɔ̀ to school'

ná'à nà í bà'à kɛ̀mú mbɛ̀ í tú 'I've come to you to ask you to
 sà íì ŋ́ bàsà, bɛ́í mâà, ná help me, because my child is
 léŋɛ̌ kì'à'é mù sick'

ànú fà'á 'à sà, kpàndá mâà, 'they're happy because rice is
 kɔ̀'ɔ́ kú'úŋ kò'ò sǎŋ mɛ̀ɛ́ 'à plentiful this year'

ŋ́ fà'á 'à sà, bɛ́í mâà, ŋ́ 'I'm happy because I was able to
 kúndà jɛ̀'ɛ́'à níɛ̀ sǎŋ mɛ̀ɛ́ 'à come back here this year'

In each of the above, only one of the expressions for 'because' is
used; the other can be substituted in every case, with no apparent
shade of difference in meaning.

12.5. Vai expressions comparable to English clauses introduced by
'before', 'until', and 'unless' are of four types, three of them par-
tially similar to each other, but none of them corresponding fully to
any one of the English subordinates. The semantic characteristics of
each must be defined apart from their English equivalents. Further,
as noted below, 'after' is simply the inverse of 'before'.

In the first type of expression, the main clause (always the first

clause in Vai) refers to a single action or event. The subordinate
clause corresponds to an English clause introduced by 'before' follow-
ing an affirmative predication only. In Vai, such clauses are common-
ly introduced by one of the conjunctions /péŋ/ or /péénéé/. Such a
conjunction is not, however, essential to the construction; it may be
omitted, and what follows conveys the meaning by itself. The conjunc-
tions themselves seem to be relatively recent innovations in Vai, since
they have initial /p/ (see 1.2 above). The clauses in question could
be classified as a type of sentence complement (cf. 11.5 above in par-
ticular), but are included here because the conjunctions are so common-
ly used. An incompletive construction is used in the subordinate
clause, with the morpheme /tò/ following the construction marker (cf.
11.4 above). In this case, /tò/ is quite clearly a form of the verb
/^{R}tǒ/ 'stay, continue'.[17] The following verb, however, is apparently
not a complement of /tò/, since it also has the low tones characteris-
tic of the incompletive, and there are no other verbal complements with
low tone. The form /tò/ may be considered to have an adverbial func-
tion, with the meaning 'still'. In these clauses, the incompletive has
a consecutive rather than a hortative or customary implication. Exam-
ples of sentences with these subordinate clauses are:

mùì kě'à núú (péŋ) sònáǎ   'we'll get there before it starts
  ì tò kè   to rain' (i.e., 'and the rain
                                     is still coming')

ànú kò'ó'à sɔ kɛ'à (péŋ)   'they stopped working before the
  té'éě ì tò jì'ì   sun set'

nà jà-fêŋě 'à (péŋ) mbè tò   'bring the money before I go to
  tàà Dhùkɔ'ɔ   Monrovia'

á'à bàŋ à má'à (péŋ) ànúì   'he finished doing it before they
  tò nà   came' / 'they came after he fi-
                                     nished doing it'

All efforts to elicit subordinates of the 'after' type resulted in
inversions like the last of the above.

12.6. In the second type of sentence under consideration, the main
clause refers to a continuing action or state; further, the reference

is to the past. In this case, the subordinate clause corresponds to an
English 'before' or 'until' clause following a negative predication, or
to an 'until' clause following an affirmative predication. It will
probably be easier to follow the description and alternative possibili-
ties for these if examples are given first:

ŋ́ má à fɛ̀'ɛ̀, à tǒ'à (à 'ɔ̀)   'I didn't see him before (/until)
    ná'à nú tò   I left there'

ánú tǒ'à sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà, à tǒ'à   'they kept on working until the
    (à 'ɔ̀) té'éě jì'í'à   sun set'

ŋ́ tǒ'à ná jà-fêŋě kpà'ò-   'I kept on looking for my money
    náà, à tǒ'à (à 'ɔ̀) ná'à   until I found it'
    à fɛ̀'ɛ̀

   In the first (main) clause of the second and third of the above ex-
amples, it is also possible to use a simple completive construction:
/ànú'à sɔ̌ kɛ̀/ 'they worked', /ná'à ná jà-fêŋě kpà'ò/ 'I looked for my
money'. The use of the verb /ᴿtǒ/ 'stay, continue' (in the situatio-
nal) with a complement in which the verb has the suffix /-nà/ (cf. 11.1
above) emphasizes the continuing nature of the action. In the subordi-
nate clauses of all three of the above, the introductory phrase /à
tǒ'à/ is again a situational construction with the same verb /ᴿtǒ/;
this is optionally followed by /à 'ɔ̀/, lit. 'its inside', so that the
entire introductory phrase means 'it continued (in it)'. The substance
of the clause is then expressed by a situational construction if the
verb is intransitive, or a completive construction if the verb is tran-
sitive. These are not interpreted as sentence complements, since they
could be used as complete sentences by themselves. They are rather in
a paratactic relationship with what precedes: 'it continued (in it), I
left there', etc.. Optionally, however, the final clause may be ex-
pressed by an incompletive, with a consecutive significance: /mbɛ̀ nú
tò/, /té'éě ì jì'ì/, /mbɛ̀ à fɛ̀'ɛ̀/. While these could also be complete
sentences, they would not by themselves have a past reference; it is
the nature of a consecutive that it has the temporal or aspectual refe-
rence of the preceding verbal construction.

   12.7. In the third type of sentence under consideration, the main
clause again refers to a continuing action or state, but the reference

of the subordinate clause is to the future; further, the anticipated
event is viewed as inevitable, or at least firmly intended. The subor-
dinate clauses in this type of sentence correspond to 'until' clauses
in English. E.g.,

wó tò sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà, àì tò 　(à 'ɔ̀) té'éě ì jì'ì	'keep on working until the sun 　sets'
mbɛ̀ tɔ̌'à à kpà'ɔ̀-náà, 　àì tò (à 'ɔ̀) mbɛ̀ à fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'I'm going to keep on looking for 　it until I find it'
ŋ́ bé'è táá'à, àì tò (à 'ɔ̀) 　té'éě ì bɔ̀	'I'm not going to go until the 　sun rises'

In these, the subordinate 'until' clause is introduced by an incom-
pletive (consecutive) construction, /àì tò (à 'ɔ̀)/ '... and it will
continue (in it)', similar to the completive used for past reference in
the sentences described in the preceding section. The substance of the
clause, as is optional with reference to the past, is obligatorily in-
completive with reference to the future, and again has a consecutive
significance.

12.8. The fourth type of sentence under consideration differs from
the third only in that the anticipated event is viewed not as inevita-
ble, but only as possible. After a negative main clause, the Vai sub-
ordinate clause corresponds to an English clause introduced by 'before',
'until', or 'unless'. After an affirmative main clause, an English
clause introduced by 'until' is the only possible alternative. In this
type of expression, the subordinate clause is introduced by one of two
conjunctions, /kɛ̀ŋgèè/ or /kɛ̀'ɔ̂ɔ̀/, and the remainder of the clause is a
conditional construction with the construction marker /kónì/ (cf. 10.4
above). In each of the following examples, /kɛ̀'ɔ̂ɔ̀/ may be substituted
for /kɛ̀ŋgèè/:

í má tàà kɛ̀ŋgèè ŋ́ kónì 　í sùndà	'don't go until (/before, unless) 　I send you'
à wé'è à mà'à kɛ̀ŋgèè 　í kónì à fɔ̀ à yè	'he won't do it until (/before, 　unless) you tell him'
à 'ɔ̀ wé'è fá'àndà kɛ̀ŋgèè 　mú kónì à 'ɔ̀ fà'àŋ	'it won't change until (/unless) 　we change it'

tò nî̀ɛ kɛ̀ŋgè̀è à kónì à fɔ̀   'stay here until he tells you to
    ì yè í̀ì tàà   go'

The forms /kɛ̀ŋgè̀è/ and /kɛ̀'ɔ̂ɔ/ may also be used in expressions like
the following, in which what follows is not predicative at all:

í má tàà kɛ̀ŋgè̀è sínà   'don't go until tomorrow'
ŋ́ wé'è à mà'à kɛ̀ŋgè̀è sínà   'I won't do it until tomorrow'
à má à mà kɛ̀ŋgè̀è sínà   'he shouldn't do it until tomorrow'

Apocopated expressions like the following are also in common use, in
response to an actual or implied request:

kɛ̀ŋgè̀è sínà   'it'll have to be tomorrow', 'not until tomorrow'

12.9. Subordinate clauses referring to known time, paralleling Eng-
lish clauses introduced by 'when' (with reference to the past) or
'while', are a type of relative clause, and will be treated along with
other relatives in 13 below.

TOPICALIZATION, QUESTION WORDS, RELATIVIZATION

13.1.   The meaning of the term "topicalization" as used here should
be unmistakably clear from the examples cited and their English equiva-
lents.[18]   Since question words in Vai are typically topicalized, they
must be treated along with topicalization in general.[19]   Although rela-
tivization is clearly related to topicalization in some languages of
the world, and although such a relationship is apparently thought by
some to be universal, it is not for that reason that relativization is
here considered under the same heading.   On the contrary, it is cruci-
ally important in the case of Vai (and almost all other Niger-Congo
languages; cf. Welmers 1973, pp. 416-45) to recognize a fundamental
difference between topicalization (as in question-word questions) and
relativization (as in "indirect questions"); the two are treated toge-
ther here precisely to point out how different they are.

Any constituent of a Vai sentence may be topicalized with the excep-
tion of the predicator (verb, identificative particle, or copula).   To
put it more positively, a subject, object, or adverbial complement may
be topicalized.   These three topicalizations must be treated separately.

Subject topicalization is expressed by /wá/ after a noun or noun
phrase subject; after a pronoun, /wá ŋgǎ wá/ is used (or perhaps bet-
ter, noun phrases topicalized by /wá/ include phrases consisting of a
pronoun plus /wá ŋgǎ/, which function as independent pronouns).   These
expressions are discussed in 6.9 above, where /wá/ and /ŋgǎ/ are inter-
preted as relational nouns, and are described as expressing emphasis or
as having an intensive use.   That is not in conflict with now referring
to the same forms used after a subject as constituting topicalization.
Topicalization implies singling out one item in contrast with all other
possible items; it has sometimes been called "contrastive emphasis."
In Vai, the idea of emphasis seems to be more fundamental than the idea
of contrast in /wá/; when /wá/ is used after a subject, however, con-

trast appears to be implicit in emphasis. At least, no other construc-
tion has been found which more explicitly expresses contrast. Topica-
lized subjects are thus illustrated in the following; compare the exam-
ples and the English equivalents in 6.9 above:

ŋ́ fǎ wá ná'à	'it was my father who came'
kímá wá bɛ̀ bè'à-náà	'it's hail that's falling'
kàí mɛ̀núú wá 'à à nyìà	'it's that man who fixed it'
kàí mɛ̀núú wá ì à nyìà	'it's that man who should fix it'
kàí mɛ̀núú wá bɛ̀ à nyíà-nà	'it's that man who's fixing it'
à wá ŋgǎ wá ná'à	'he's the one who came'
à wá ŋgǎ wá 'à à mà	'he's the one who did it'
ŋ́gá ŋgǎ wá ná'à	'it was I who came'
ŋ́gá ŋgǎ wá 'à à mà	'I'm the one who did it'
ŋ́gá ŋgǎ wá bɛ̀ à má-nà	'I'm the one who's doing it'
mú wá ŋgǎ wá bɛ̀ à má-nà	'it's we who are doing it'
mànjáǎ wá bɛ̀ níɛ̀	'it's the chief who is here'
tú'ú jàà'é wá bɛ̀ ŋ́ bò'ò	'it's palm oil that I have'
ná mìɛ́ɛ̀ wá bɛ̀ í bò'ò	'it's my knife that you have'

(The fact that English sentences in the precise form given above are
not very common and may seem awkward must by no means be interpreted as
suggesting that topicalization is less common in English than in many
other languages. Topicalization in English is more frequently sig-
nalled by contrastive stress, which is not normally represented in
written English. The first two of the above might be rephrased as '*My
father* came!' and 'It's *hailing!*', and similarly for the rest.)

   There is no parallel construction for negative subject topicaliza-
tion. A circumlocution is used, as illustrated in the following:

mɔ̀ mú 'à ná'à, ŋ́ fǎ máà	'it wasn't my father who came' (lit., 'the person who came, it is not my father')
féŋ mú bɛ̀ ŋ́ bò'ò, tú'ú jàà'é máà	'it isn't palm oil that I have' (lit., 'the thing that I have, it isn't palm oil'
mɔ̀ mú 'à à mà, à wá máà	'it wasn't he who did it'

   13.2. An object (of an affirmative sentence only) is topicalized by

being placed in sentence-initial position and followed by the identi-
fier /mù/. What follows must, however, be a complete sentence in it-
self. A pronoun must be used in the usual object position, recapitula-
ting the displaced object. If the topicalized object is a noun or noun
phrase, and if its reference is explicitly singular or if number is ir-
relevant, the recapitulating pronoun is the third person singular, /à/.
If the reference of the object is explicitly plural, the recapitulating
pronoun is the third person plural, /ànú/. If the topicalized object
is a pronoun, it is followed by /wá/, with alternants as described in
6.9 above, and this entire phrase is followed by /mù/; the recapitula-
ting pronoun in the following sentence is then the same in person and
number. The recapitulating pronouns are reflected in the English equi-
valents of the following examples by the appropriate pronoun in paren-
theses:

mànjáǎ mù ná'à à fɛ'ɛ	'it was the chief that I saw (him)'
tú'ú jàà'é mù mú'à à sàŋ	'it was palm oil that we bought
lɔ̌ǒ 'ɔ	(it) in the market'
kɔ̌ŋ mù ànú'à à tìɛ	'it was sticks that they cut (it)'
kpɛ́ mù ànú bɛ à mì-náà	'it's wine that they're drinking
	(it)'
lɛ̀ndé mɛ̀núú mù ŋ́ fǎ wò'ó'à	'it's that car that my father wants
àì à sàŋ	to buy (it)'
mɔ̌ mɛ̀núú nú mù mú'à ànú	'it was those people that we saw
fɛ̀'ɛ kúnù	(them) yesterday'
ŋ́gá mù yá'à ŋ́ fɛ̀'ɛ	'it was me that you saw (me)'
í wá mù ná'à í kè'è	'it was you that I called (you)'
múànú wá mù á'à mú màì	'it was us that he insulted (us)'
ànúànú wá mù mànjáǎ 'à ànú	'it was them that the chief forced
mà ànúì sɔ̌ kɛ̀	(them) to work'

In negative sentences, the only form of topicalization is the use of
the emphatic marker /wá/ after the object in the usual object position:

ŋ́ má mànjáǎ wá fɛ̀'ɛ	'it wasn't the chief that I saw'
ànú bé'è kpɛ́ wá mì-náà	'it isn't wine that they're
	drinking'
ŋ́ má í wá kè'è	'it isn't you that I called'

13.3. Again in affirmative sentences only, an entire adverbial complement may be topicalized by being placed in sentence-initial position followed by /mù/, with a restriction noted below. Such a topicalized complement is not recapitulated in the following sentence, which is complete by itself in any case.[20] Many adverbial complements, however, are relational noun phrases, which are described in 6.7 above. Such a complement may be topicalized in its entirety, but it is also possible to topicalize only the "possessor"; in such a case, there must be a recapitulating pronoun before the relational noun in its usual complement position. Still other adverbial complements have a relational particle, as distinguished from a relational noun, in final position; the status of relational particles is also discussed in 6.7 above. Such complements cannot be topicalized in their entirety. Only the "possessor" can be topicalized, and a recapitulating pronoun with the relational particle is obligatory in the usual complement position in the following sentence. The instances of recapitulation by pronouns in the following examples are identifiable by parenthesized pronouns in the English equivalents:

kúnù mù ŋ́ ná'à níέ	'it was yesterday that I came here'
níέ mù ŋ́ ná'à kúnù	'it was here that I came yesterday'
wɔ̀'έ mù ná'à mìέ mὲέ sàŋ	'it was today that I bought this knife'
núú mù ná'à à fὲ'ὲ	'it was there that I saw him'
Jɔ̀ndú mù ná'à mànjáǎ fὲ'ὲ	'it was in Jɔ̀ndú that I saw the chief'
sànjáǎ 'ɔ mù ná'à à fὲ'ὲ	'it was in town that I saw him'
sànjáǎ 'ɔ mù ŋ́ bὲ táá-nà	'it's into town that I'm going'
kùndáà 'ɔ mù à'à lɔ́ŋ tàà	'it was in an iron pot that she cooked rice'
kùndáà mù à'à lɔ́ŋ tàà à 'ɔ	'it was an iron pot that she cooked rice in (it)'
kɔ̀'ɔ́ mù à ná'à à 'à	'it was rice that he brought (it)'
(cf.: à ná'à kɔ̀'ɔ́ 'à, lit. 'he came rice + associative rel. part.', i.e., 'he came with rice')	
ná bhù mù à'à kó'í̌έ fàà à 'à	'it was my gun that he killed the leopard with (it)'

múànú mù à bὲ sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà   'it's us that he's working for
    mú yὲ   (us)'
í fǎ mù ŋ́ wò'ó'à mbὲ à fɔ̀   'it's your father that I want to
    à yὲ   tell it to (him)'
mànjǎǎ mù ànú táá'à à bà'à   'it was the chief that they went
                                    to (him)'
mànjáǎ mù ànú kóáí'à à bà'à   'it was the chief that they spoke
                                    to (him)'
ŋ́gá mù à sɔ́'à ŋ́ máì   'it was me that he stood beside
                                    (me)'

13.4.   There are three types of interrogative subjects. First, the
question words /jɔ̂/ 'who?' and /mbê/ 'what?' may be used as subjects by
themselves. Second /jɔ̂/ may be used as the possessor of a noun to form
an interrogative phrase; it is followed by /wá/ in this case. Third, a
noun may be followed by an interrogative modifier: /kámà/ 'how many?',
/mîa(nà)/ 'which?', or /lɛ́'lɛ̌ mîa(nà)/ 'what kind of?'. (The third of
these is, of course, only a special instance of the second; /lɛ́'ì/ is a
relational noun meaning 'kind'.) Any of these interrogative subjects
may be used before the identifier /mù/ to form a complete question.
They may also be topicalized according to the pattern outlined in 13.1
above, by adding /wá/ after them. Examples of such interrogative sub-
jects are:

jɔ̂ mù   'who is it?'
jɔ̂ wá ná'à   'who came?'
jɔ̂ wá 'à à mà   'who did it?'
jɔ̂ wá ì à fɔ́'à à yὲ   'who's going to tell (it to) him?'
mbê mù   'what is it?'
mbê wá má'à   'what happened?'
mbê wá ì má'à   'what's going to happen?'
mbê wá 'à í mììnyà   'what frightened you?

jɔ̂ wá tá mù   'whose is it?'
jɔ̂ wá á jà-fêŋ mù   'whose money is it?'
jɔ̂ wá fǎ wá ná'à   'whose father came?'
jɔ̂ wá á wù'ú wá 'à í mììnyà   'whose dog frightened you?'
jɔ̂ wá á léŋɛ̌ wá 'à à mà   'whose child did it?'

mɔ̀ kámà wá ná'à	'how many people came?'
mɔ̀ kámà wá 'à mú fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'how many people saw us?'
wù'ù míànà wá 'à í mììnyà	'which dog frightened you?'
wù'ù lɛ́'ìɛ̌ míànà wá 'à í mììnyà	'what kind of dog was it that frightened you?'

13.5. The same question words and phrases may be used as objects. As such, at least in short questions, they may appear in the usual object position, usually followed by /wá/. Very commonly, however, they are topicalized, following the pattern outlined in 13.2 above. Examples of interrogative objects, with the topicalization construction appearing first in each of the following pairs, are:

jɔ̂ mù yá'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'who did you see (him)?'
~ yá'à jɔ̂ wá fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'you saw who?'
mbê mù à'à à mà	'what did he do (it)?'
~ à'à mbê wá mà	'he did what?'
mìɛ̀ kámà mù à'à à sàŋ	'how many knives did he buy (it)?'
~ à'à mìɛ̀ kámà wá sàŋ	'he bought how many knives?'
mìɛ́ɛ̌ míànà mù à'à à sàŋ	'which knife did he buy (it)?'
~ à'à mìɛ́ɛ̌ míànà wá sàŋ	'he bought which knife?'
mìɛ̀ lɛ́'ìɛ̌ míànà mù à'à à sàŋ	'what kind of a knife did he buy (it)?'
~ à'à mìɛ̀ lɛ́'ìɛ̌ míànà wá sàŋ	'he bought what kind of a knife?'

13.6. Four interrogative complements have been recorded. The first is a simple question word, /míá/ 'where?', which may be topicalized following the pattern outlined in 13.3 above, or which may appear in the usual complement position, optionally followed by /wá/. The second is a phrase, /míá bàndà/ 'when?', the first word of which is clearly the same as the question word meaning 'where?'; this has been recorded only as topicalized. The third is a possessive phrase, /mbê wá kó/ 'why?' (lit., 'the matter of what?'); this also has been recorded only as topicalized. Compare possessive phrases with /jɔ̂/ 'who?' in 13.4 above. The fourth interrogative complement, /kámà wà'à/ 'how?', has been recorded only in complement position, not topicalized. My notes

do not explicitly exclude the possibility of a topicalized construc-
tion, but I have been so conscious of the fact that expressions for
'how?' function differently from all other interrogative expressions
throughout the Niger-Congo languages (cf. Welmers 1973, p. 417 ff.)
that I am confident that I checked and found the illustration below to
be the only possibility. Interrogative complements are thus illustra-
ted by the following:

míá mù à táá'à	'where did he go?'
~ à táá'à míá (wá)	'he went where?'
míá mù à'à kɔ'ɔ́ mènúú sàŋ	'where did he buy that rice?'
míá bàndà mù à ná'à	'when did he come?'
míá bàndà mù íì ná lèndéě	'when are you going to fix my car?'
nyíà'à	
mbê wá kó mù à'à à mà	'why did he do it?'
à'à à mà kámà wà'à	'how did he do it?'

13.7. In indirect questions (such as 'I don't know who came'), none
of the above question words or phrases is used. Each must be replaced
by a noun in a relative construction. It should be noted that the
phraseology "a noun plus a relative clause" is carefully avoided here,
for reasons that will become clear in the development of this descrip-
tion. Relativization will first be introduced in this restricted con-
text of indirect questions, but generalizations of the pattern, and
complications in constituent order, will be treated in 13.10-12 below.
The essential ingredient in all relative constructions is the use of
the relative marker /mú/ after the head noun. It will not be demon-
strable from the data in this section, but will become clear in the
following sections, that this /mú/ is not a "relative pronoun"; it
serves only to signal the presence of a relative construction, of which
the preceding noun is the head. The term "antecedent" does not seem
appropriate.

Two variables must be taken into account for any relative construc-
tion. The first is internal: the function of the head noun within the
relative construction itself; it may be subject, possessor, object, or
complement. The second is external: the function of the entire rela-
tive construction in the sentence as a whole. In indirect questions
such as those treated in this and the following two sections, the rela-

tive construction is neither the subject, object, nor complement of the
entire sentence. It is rather an appended comment, explanatory of an
object pronoun in the preceding full sentence. Each of the examples
below begins with /ŋ́ má à sɔ̀/ 'I don't know it', and the appended rela-
tive construction specifies what is not known.

First, indirect questions will be treated in which the head noun is
the subject of the relative construction, or the possessor of the sub-
ject. The question words used in parallel questions (13.4 above), and
the corresponding nouns used in indirect questions, are as follows:

jɜ	'who?'	mɔ̌	'person'
mbê	'what?'	kó	'thing (abstract)'
		féŋ	'thing (material)'
kámà	'how many?'	kí'í	'number'
mɪ́à(nà)	'which?'	kɛ̀	'the one' (or zero)

In the relative constructions in the following indirect questions,
the appropriate noun followed by /mú/ functions exactly like a noun by
itself in a non-relative construction. These indirect questions should
be compared with the direct questions in 13.4 above:

ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ mú mù	'I don't know who it is'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ mú ná'à	'I don't know who came'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ mú 'à à mà	'I don't know who did it'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ kó mú má'à	'I don't know what happened'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ kó mú ì má'à	'I don't know what'll happen'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ féŋ mú 'à à kà'ì	'I don't know what broke it'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ mú tá mù	'I don't know whose it is'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ mú á jà-fêŋ mù	'I don't know whose money it is'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ mú fǎ wá ná'à	'I don't know whose father came'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ mú á wù'ú wá	'I don't know whose dog frightened
'à à mììnyà	him'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ kí'í mú 'à mú	'I don't know how many people saw
fɛ̀'ɛ̀	us'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ wù'ú (- wù'úɛ̌ kɛ̀)	'I don't know which dog frightened
mú 'à à mììnyà	him'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ wù'ù lɛ́'ì mú 'à	'I don't know what kind of a dog
à mììnyà	frightened him'

13.8.   Second, indirect questions will be treated in which the head
noun is the object in the relative construction. In these appended re-
lative constructions, the object noun followed by /mú/ appears in the
usual object position, not preposed. This illustrates the inappropri-
ateness of the term "antecedent." The relative marker /mú/ is incor-
porated in the relative construction, so that the noun plus /mú/ func-
tions exactly like an object noun by itself in a non-relative construc-
tion. The nouns used are the same as those listed in the preceding
section, paralleling the same question words. The following indirect
questions should be compared with the direct questions in 13.5 above:

ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à mɔ̀ mú fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'I don't know who he saw'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à kó mú mà	'I don't know what he did'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à féŋ mú fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'I don't know what he saw'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à mìɛ̀ kí'í mú sàŋ	'I don't know how many knives he bought'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à mìɛ̀ (~ mìɛ́ɛ̌ kɛ̀) mú sàŋ	'I don't know which knife he bought'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à mìɛ̀ lɛ́'ì mú sàŋ	'I don't know what kind of a knife he bought'

If the head noun is the possessor of another noun, the entire noun
phrase may be followed by /wá/ in the usual object position, or it may
be topicalized as outlined in 13.2 above:

ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à mɔ̀ mú á wù'ú wá fɛ̀'ɛ̀	'I don't know whose dog he saw' (I neg. it know he person rel.'s dog. emph. saw)
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ mɔ̀ mú á wù'ú mù à'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀	(same: I neg. it know person rel.'s dog it-is he it saw)

13.9.   Third, indirect questions will be considered in which the
head noun functions as the complement in the relative construction.
The relevant nouns, with corresponding question words and phrases, are:

míá	'where?'	kàà	'place'
kámà wà'à	'how?'	kí'í	'manner'
míá bàndà	'when?'	kàà ... bàndà	'time'
mbê wá kó	'why?'	kó ... wá kó	'reason'

It should be noted that the noun /kí'í/ refers to 'number' when used as subject or object, but to 'manner' when used as a complement; the parallel question forms are also clearly related. In the last two of the above, the words /bàndà/ and /kó/ are, or function as, relational nouns. There is clearly a relationship between the expressions referring to place and time, but the semantic nature of it has not been fully determined. There is other evidence for /bàndà/ meaning 'time' by itself; /kó/ is amply attested in the meaning 'thing (abstract)', from which the idea of 'reason' is an easy step.

In direct questions, as noted in 13.6 above, /míá/ 'where?' may be topicalized, but /kámà wà'à/ 'how?' is attested only in complement position. In indirect questions, the nouns in the parallel relative constructions, followed by /mú/, appear in complement position in both cases. In the relative constructions referring to time and reason, which differ from the above in that the noun followed by /mú/ is the possessor of a following noun, topicalization is found. The following should be compared with the direct questions in 13.6 above:

ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à táá'à kàà mú	'I don't know where he went'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à kɔ̀'ɔ́ mɛ̀núú sàŋ kàà mú	'I don't know where he bought that rice'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ à'à à mà kí'í mú	'I don't know how he did it'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ kàà mú bàndà mù à ná'à	'I don't know when he came'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ kàà mú bàndà mù àì lɛ̀ndɛ́ɛ̌ nyíà'à	'I don't know when he's going to fix the car'
ŋ́ má à sɔ̀ kó mú wá kó mù à'à à mà	'I don't know why he did it'

13.10. All of the relative constructions illustrated up to this point have been appended comments, independent of the structure of the main part of the sentence. Such relative constructions may also function as the subject, object, or complement within a sentence.[21] If a relative construction functions as subject, the entire construction is followed by a pause, and what follows is itself a complete sentence. If what follows is a copulative or verbal predication, it begins with the appropriate subject pronoun. The relative construction in these

cases is a "suspended topic,"[22] which is then recapitulated by a sub-
ject pronoun. One may also include here identificative constructions
of a type already described in 9.1 above.

Internally, if the head noun functions as the subject of the rela-
tive construction, it is followed by /mú/ in subject position, and the
remainder of the construction follows. E.g.,

kàì mú 'à à mà, à bὲ nίὲ   'the man who did it is here'

mùsù mú wó'ó'à ká'ó mὲnúú   'the woman who gave birth last
  'à, à fàá'à kúnù   month died yesterday'

kàì mú ná'à wɔ̀'ɛ́, ɋ́ fǎ mù   'the man who came today is my
                                  father'

If the head noun functions as the object of the relative construc-
tion, there are two possibilities. First, the noun followed by /mú/
may appear in the usual object position, as in the appended comments
described in 13.8 above. (This illustrates the unusual pattern of re-
lativization found in other Northern Mande languages also.) Alterna-
tively, the head noun may be preposed, and recapitulated in the usual
object position by a pronoun. This is superficially similar to object
topicalization (13.2 above), but the preposing of the object in this
case serves a different purpose: to place the noun which is the subject
of the entire sentence in initial position. E.g.,

ànú'à mɔ̀ mú fὲ'ὲ sànjáǎ 'ɔ̀,   'the person they saw in town is
  à bὲ nίὲ   here' (they person rel. saw the-
                                   town's inside, he is here)

mɔ̀ mú ànú'à à fὲ'ὲ sànjáǎ   (same: person rel. they him saw
  'ɔ̀, à bὲ nίὲ   the town's inside, he is here)

mú'à nyίɛ́ mú sàŋ, à tò'í'à   'the fish we bought has spoiled'
                                 (we fish rel. bought, it is-
                                  spoiled)

nyίɛ́ mú mú'à à sàŋ, à tò'í'à (same: fish rel. we it bought, ...)

If the head noun functions as the complement of the relative con-
struction, it is preposed in all of the cases recorded. A relational
noun in such a complement appears after /mú/. There is no recapitula-
tion. A relational particle, however, appears in the usual complement

position, preceded by a pronoun recapitulating the noun. E.g.,

hǐí í bɔ̌'à Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀, sànjá   'if you start from Monrovia, the
  sénjénà mú íì kě'à Wàkɔ́'ɔ̀   first town (rel.) you will arrive
  gbú 'ɔ̀, à tɜ̀ŋ Gbàà   at in Cape Mount Co. (, it) is
                                       called Gbàà'

sànjá mú 'ɔ̀ ná'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀,   'the town in which I saw him is
  à tɜ̀ŋ Jɔ̀ndú   called Jɔ̀ndú'

wù'ù mú à ná'à à 'à, à'à   'the dog he brought (came with it)
  ŋ́ bó'ó kìŋ   bit my hand'

13.11. If a relative construction functions as the object of an en-
tire sentence, it too is preposed in full as a suspended topic, and is
recapitulated in the usual object position by the appropriate object
pronoun. If the relative construction were to appear in object posi-
tion, many sentences would end with an impermissible sequence of two
verbs. They would also begin with two subjects, each followed by a
construction marker in most cases.

In the following, the entire relative construction is an object, but
internally the head noun is the subject of the relative construction:

mɔ̀ mú 'à ná mìɛ̌ɛ̀ kǎà,   'the person who stole my knife,
  ànú'à à bì'à   they caught him'

In the following, the head noun is the object of the relative con-
struction. From the viewpoint of English and many other languages, it
is unusual not to find the head noun either in the object position of
the entire sentence or initially:

ná'à mìɛ̀ mú sàŋ kúnù,   'he stole the knife that I bought
  à'à à kǎà   yesterday' (I knife rel. bought
                                       yesterday, he it stole)

ná'à kòòsíl mú bì'à,   'I measured the barracuda that I
  ná'à à sùmà   caught' (I barracuda rel. caught,
                                       I it measured)[23]

One might expect that the head noun in an object relative construc-
tion might appear in the usual object position, followed by /mú/, with
the rest of the relative construction following the verb. Actually,
the following is a legitimate sentence:

ànú'à mɔ̀ mú bì'à, à'à ná mìɛ́ɛ̌ kàa̋.

(they person rel. caught, he my knife stole)

It does not, however, mean 'they caught the person who stole my knife,'
but rather 'the person whom they caught stole my knife.' This very de-
vice may be used for an object relative, however, if another noun fol-
lowed by /mú/ precedes it in a double relative. In the following, the
double relative functions as the object in the full sentence, but it
could also function as a subject:

mɔ̀ mú 'à mìɛ̀ mú kàa̋ ná'à à   'the person who stole the knife
   sàŋ kúnù, ànú'à à bì'à   that I bought yesterday, they
                                     caught him'

(person rel. CM knife rel. stole I it bought yesterday, ...)

   13.12. If a relative construction functions as the complement of an
entire sentence, it appears in the usual complement position in all re-
corded cases, except for some temporal complements as noted below.
Within the relative construction, the head noun is preposed and fol-
lowed by /mú/. If the head noun is the subject of the relative con-
struction, and if a relational noun or particle follows /mú/, the head
noun is recapitulated by a subject pronoun. E.g.,

ànúànú wá mù ná'à wù'ù mú   'it was they who brought (came
   'à à'à ŋ́ bó'ó kìŋ   with) the dog that (it) bit my
                                     hand'

   If the head noun of the relative construction functions as its ob-
ject, it is recapitulated by an object pronoun. E.g.,

à'à lɔ́ŋ tàà kùndáà mú 'ɔ̀   'she cooked rice in the pot that
   ná'à à sàŋ   I bought (it)'

   If the head noun of the relative construction functions as its com-
plement, and if in the usual complement position the noun would be fol-
lowed by a relational particle, the particle appears in the usual com-
plement position in the relative construction, preceded by a pronoun
recapitulating the noun (cf. 13.10 above). E.g.,

à'à lɔ́ŋ tàà kùndáà mú 'ɔ̀   'she cooked rice in the pot that
   ŋ́ ná'à à 'à   I brought (came with it)'

Such complement relative constructions are the usual equivalents of English subordinate clauses referring to known time in the past or present, the treatment of which was delayed until this point as indicated in 12.9 above. In the following, the noun /bàndà/ 'time' is used in the relative construction (cf. 13.9 above); unlike the examples above, the entire relative construction is preposed in the sentence in the following, and the head noun of the relative is not preposed in the relative construction itself. It seems likely that this pattern is restricted to relative complements referring to known time. Thus:

à ná'à bàndà mú 'à, ŋ́ bɛ̀   'when he came, I was asleep'
  kĭ 'ɔ̀

ná'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀ bàndà mú 'à,   'when I saw him, he was sick'
  à kì'à'é mù

In an answer to a question such as 'When did you see him?', /bàndà/ has also been recorded as a relational noun, possessed and preposed, in the following:

à bàndà mú ŋ́ ná'à   'when I came' (its time rel. I came)

In other complement relatives, the nominal expression for 'time' described in 13.9 above, /kàà ... bàndà/, is commonly used. The free noun /wátí/ (ultimately of Arabic origin) may also be used. Once more, the relative construction appears in the usual complement position in the entire sentence, and its head noun is preposed:

ná'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀ kàà mú bàndà   'I saw him when I came'
  ŋ́ ná'à

à ná'à kàà mú bàndà ŋ́ bɛ̀   'he came while I was working'
  sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà
  (~ à ná'à wátí mú ŋ́ bɛ̀ sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà)

àì à má'à kàà mú bàndà mú   'he'll do it while we're eating'
  bɛ̀ féŋ lɔ́n-nà

Similar relationships between actions or events are also frequently expressed by sentence parataxis, which will be treated in 14 below.

CHAPTER 14
SENTENCE CONJUNCTION

14.1.   In the limited time available for work on Vai, no systematic
effort was made to discover a variety of ways in which a transition
might be made from one sentence to another in connected discourse. No
texts were recorded, and little more than the simplest question-answer
conversational exchanges. Nevertheless, some significant information
came to light in the course of investigating the equivalents of English
subordinate clauses in particular. It seems quite possible that what
could be added to the patterns described here would consist largely of
a list of additional transitional words and phrases, with little by way
of unexpected or unusual structural features. A more extensive treat-
ment of discourse is, of course, to be desired. No apology is needed,
however, for considering such a treatment beyond the scope of the pre-
sent grammar.

Perhaps the most significant feature found in sequences of sentences
is the extent of the use of simple sentence parataxis. Several instan-
ces of this were recorded in the process of eliciting equivalents of
English subordinate clauses. As noted in preceding portions of this
grammar, Vai has special constructions for a variety of subordinations;
in several cases, however, alternate equivalents were offered in which
sentence parataxis is used. These include, but are not restricted to,
uses of the incompletive construction in the second sentence as a "con-
secutive" (cf. 11.5 above, where the incompletive can also be interpre-
ted as a sentence complement expressing purpose).

In 12.4 above, equivalents of causal subordinates are described,
using the phrases /kpàndá máà/ and /bɛ́í máà/ 'because' (lit., 'it is
not without reason'). These are themselves essentially paratactic con-
structions, though they make use of a special conjunctive predication.
The same idea can be expressed by simple parataxis in instances like
the following; 'because' was used in the English sentence for which

this was given as an equivalent:

ŋ̀ wò'ó'à mbὲ tàà kùú 'ɔ̀;   'I want to go home; my head aches
ŋ̀ kŭŋɛ̆ bὲ ŋ̀ lún-nà   (is hurting me)'

The first of the following was offered as a simple and common alter-
native of the second:

ŋ̀ bὲ sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà; à ná'à   'I was (/am) working; he came'
à ná'à wátí mú ŋ̀ bὲ sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà 'he came while I was working'

Similarly, the following were offered as alternatives; the first il-
lustrates the consecutive use of the incompletive:

í ŋ̀ kɔ̀nɔ̀, mbὲ bàŋ féŋ lɔ́ndà   'wait for me, and I (will) finish
                                    eating'

í ŋ̀ kɔ̀nɔ̀, àì tò (à 'ɔ̀) mbὲ   'wait for me until I finish eating'
bàŋ féŋ lɔ́ndà   (cf. 12.7 above)

Parataxis is also used to express comparison, as in the following:

kéŋ mὲ́ kò'ɔ̀; à bĕ'à kὲnú 'à 'this house is large; it surpasses
                                    the other one' (i.e., 'this house
                                    is larger than that one')

The significance of the foregoing lies in the fact that even the
little data recorded, along with other similar alternatives that were
heard but not transcribed, are sufficient to show that Vai makes use of
sentence parataxis considerably more than most other languages, inclu-
ding other Mande languages, with which I have worked. In many other
languages, consecutivization (at best a special type of parataxis) is
commonly used where Vai simply strings repeated instances of the same
construction one after another. This will become even more evident in
the following section.

14.2. As is almost universally true in Niger-Congo languages, a
conjunction which joins nouns (/bὲ/ in the case of Vai) cannot be used
to join verbs or sentences. Vai does, however, have a sentence conjunc-
tion, /ámù/, which seems primarily to convey the idea of 'and then, and
so'. It is likely that this is a form of, or is derived from, the iden-
tificative predication /à wá mù/ 'it is it' (referring to the previous
predication) (also 'it is he, it is she' in other contexts, but personal

reference is excluded in this case).[24] If so, its very use constitutes
parataxis at least in the underlying structure. In many instances com-
parable to those illustrated below, /ámù/ was explicitly said to be op-
tional. After a future, an incompletive construction is used, which
suggests consecutivization. Examples of the largely optional use of
/ámù/ are as follows:

mù táá'à kùú 'ɔ; (ámù) mú'à lɔ́ŋ tàà	'we went home and cooked rice'

mbὲ táá'à kùú 'ɔ; (ámù)
    mbὲ lɔ́ŋ tàà
	'I'm going to go home and (in due
	    course) cook rice' (without /ámù/,
	    this would more likely be inter-
	    preted as expressing purpose)

ná gbɔ̀ɔ̀ɛ̌ 'à kpà'à wí kínɛ́í;
    ámù sɔ̀náǎ kě'a
	'my farm had just gotten dry, and
	    the rain came'

The appropriateness of simple parataxis, and the optionality of the
conjunctive /ámù/, are vividly demonstrated by a conversation (in Eng-
lish) with Fr. Kandakai after we had heard a little of a Vai news
broadcast on a car radio. He mentioned that the particular announcer
we had been listening to was well known for his sprinkling /ámù, ámù,
ámù/ liberally through his news reports, when in most cases it was un-
necessary; the effect was clearly considered rather amusing. Apparent-
ly /ámù/ functions for some people as a sort of hesitation form, though
there are undoubtedly some cases in which it is meaningful and stylis-
tically desirable.

14.3. A sentence giving contradictory information, or expressing a
reservation, is introduced by /kɛ́'ɛ́/ 'but'. E.g.,

ŋ́ wò'ó'à mbὲ tàà kùú 'ɔ,
    kɛ́'ɛ́ à'à ŋ́ bhɔ̀ɔ̀ mbὲ tò nɛ́ὲ
	'I want to go home, but he begged
	    me to stay here'

ŋ́ fǎ táá'à kùú 'ɔ, kɛ́'ɛ́
    ŋ́gá tɔ̌'à nɛ́ὲ
	'my father went home, but I stayed
	    here'

14.4. A change of subject may be marked by the form /pɛ́'ɛ́/ (see
6.10 above) after the expression for the new subject. Since /pɛ́'ɛ́/
in other uses means 'also', the basic idea conveyed seems to be that of
new information. English equivalents may include 'and', 'but', 'in

turn', 'however', 'on the other hand'. There may well be another form
with a similar usage, but this is the only one recorded (with no spe-
cial effort to elicit anything of the sort). E.g.,

ŋ́ ŋgɔ̀ɔ̀, kò'à lɛ́ɛ́-mɔ̀ɔ̀ mù.　　'My older brother is a weaver.
　ŋ́ nyɔ̀mɔ́ pɛ́'ɛ́, kò'à sɔ́'ɔ́-　　My younger brother, on the other
　mɔ̀ɔ̀ mù.　　　　　　　　　hand, is a tailor.'

14.5.   The relational noun phrase /à káŋgɔ́'ɔ̀/ 'after it, afterwards'
(which also, strangely, means 'his throat') may be used to introduce a
sentence referring to a later event, in the past or future. E.g.,

ŋ́ táá'à kà'à kɔ́'ɔ̀ sǎŋ tâŋ　　'I attended school for twelve
　fɛ̀'á. à káŋgɔ́'ɔ̀, ŋ́ ná'à　　years. After that, I came to
　Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀ mbɛ̀ sɔ̌ kɛ̀.　　　　Monrovia to work.'

ŋ́ wò'ó'à mbɛ̀ bàŋ sɔ̌ mɛ́ɛ́ kɛ̀　'I want to finish this job tomor-
　sínà. à káŋgɔ́'ɔ̀, mbɛ̀ yá　　row. After that, I'll fix your
　lɛ̀ndɛ́ɛ̌ nyɪ́à'à.　　　　　car.'

There are undoubtedly other conjunctive phrases, as suggested in
14.1 above, that are used in a similar way to express ideas like 'there-
fore', 'at the same time', 'in that way', possibly 'in spite of that',
and so on. Although such expressions are likely to be phrases rather
than single words, they may well be more appropriate to a lexicon than
to a grammar, as indeed /à káŋgɔ́'ɔ̀/ would appear to be. They also im-
pinge on the category of adverbs, treated in 15 below.

CHAPTER 15

ADVERBIALS AND IDEOPHONES

15.1.   A number of words and phrases with an adverbial function have appeared throughout this grammar, but for the most part they have not been systematically treated.   Nor is there any particular reason why special attention should have been given to them before this.   Except for what has already been noted about them (especially in 6.7,8 above and in the discussion of topicalization and relativization, 13), they present no special syntactic problem, and can pretty much be taken for granted.   At the same time, they constitute a basic constituent in Vai sentences, and as such deserve to be separately recognized and described.   In a very few cases, the grammatical classification of a word is problematic apart from an effort to define adverbs.

It would appear that adverbials, including single words and nominal phrases, can be satisfactorily defined as anything that may appear after the verb in a sentence.   Some such words and phrases may also have a non-adverbial function elsewhere in a sentence, and may even be topicalized as adverbials.   The possibility of appearing in post-verbal position, however, seems to be diagnostic for identifying a word or phrase as adverbial.

In connection with identifying certain morphemes as relational nouns or relational particles, 6.7,8 above, an exceedingly common type of adverbial complement was described and illustrated.   It is appropriate to review those here from the viewpoint of their meaning and function, rather than from the viewpoint of their internal composition.   First, a great many of them are locative, of which the following are a few illustrations:

à sìí'à sĕŋĕ̀ mà   'he sat down on the rock'

à'à kpò'óĕ̀ sìì kẵẵ kùmà   'he put the book on the box'

ànú bɛ̀ féŋ lóndà kéŋɛ̌ 'ɔ   'they're eating in the house'

à sɔ́'à ànú tɛ́	'he stood up between them'
à nùú'à kɔ̌ŋɛ̌ kpáà'ɔ̀	'he hid behind the tree'
kà'áǎ bɛ̀ sɛ̌ŋɛ̌ kɔ́'ɔ̀	'the snake is under the rock'
à sìí'à ŋ́ já'à	'he sat down in front of me'
ànú táá'à mànjáǎ bà'à	'they went to the chief'
sɔ̀ ŋ́ máì	'stand beside me'

The meaning of the relational particle /yè/ is at best only marginally locative. It has an applicative meaning, indicating the person to whom something is said or for whom something is done. E.g.,

à'à à fɔ̀ mú yè	'he told (it to) us'
à bɛ̀ sɔ̀ kɛ́-nà mú yè	'he's working for us'

Phrases with the relational particle /'à/ express a variety of relationships to the preceding verb, which may be subsumed under the heading "association." These include instrument, accompaniment, material, and personal involvement (as with a disease or disability). Also included here, and not mentioned in 6.7 above, are phrases with nouns which express a manner of doing something; there are undoubtedly many more than the two included in the following illustrations:

à'à sùɛ́ɛ̌ tìɛ̀ mìɛ́ 'à	'he cut the meat with a knife'
à ná'à kɔ̀'ɔ́ 'à	'he brought (came with) rice'
à'à à nyìà kɔ̌ŋ 'à	'he made it out of wood'
bòmbò bɛ̀ à'à	'he has smallpox'
à'à sɔ̌ kɛ̀ gànàà 'à	'he worked with all his strength'
à'à à mà sɛ́mbɛ́ 'à	'he did it well'

To these may now be added some adverbial complement phrases with temporal meaning, but with the same structure. The relational noun /'ɔ̀/ 'inside' and the relational particle /'à/ expressing association are attested in such phrases. E.g.,

à ná'à lìfí 'ɔ̀	'he came during the night'
àì sɔ̌ kɛ̀ té'é 'ɔ̀	'he works during the day'
mbɛ̀ à má'à ɓààmà 'ɔ̀	'I'll do it in the morning'
ná'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀ jɛ̀'ìmàǎ 'à	'I saw him this evening'
mbɛ̀ táá'à núú ká'ó mɛ̀núú 'à	'I'm going to go there next month'
ŋ́ ná'à níɛ̀ ká'ó mɛ̀núú 'à	'I came here last month'

In the fourth of the above examples, the definite suffix in the form /jɛ̀'ìmàǎ/ suggests 'this'; the time is the cool of the day, from about 4 P.M. until dark. In the last two examples, the phrase /káʼó mènúú/ is literally 'that month'; it refers to the month adjacent to 'this month', which may be either 'next month' or 'last month' depending on the temporal reference of the rest of the sentence.

15.2. A number of single words, or phrases of other types, are also used as adverbials, both locative and temporal. Some of these function also as nouns, though usages of them as subject or object may be rare; they may, however, be topicalized. The first category of these that may be mentioned is place names, such as /Dhùkɔ́'ɔ̀/ 'Monrovia', /Wàkɔ́'ɔ̀/ 'Robertsport', /Sɛ̀ŋkɔ́'ɔ̀/ 'Sinkor' ('behind the rock', a suburb of Monrovia), /Jɔ̀ndú/, /Gbàà/. Further illustrations of the use of these do not seem necessary.

The locative words /nîɛ/ 'here' and /núú/ 'there' seem to be similar to place names in their usage. The latter of these has, however, been recorded in some usages with a short vowel, /nú/. Fr. Kandakai recognizes the distinction in vowel length, but the conditions under which the alternate forms are used have not been isolated. In at least some cases, apparently either form is acceptable.

The word /póʼóŋ/ 'far away' has been recorded only as an adverbial, in /à táá'à póʼóŋ/ 'he has gone far away.' Perhaps too hastily, it was listed as an equivalent of /kpɔ́ŋ/; the latter, however, was recorded only as an attributive in the phrase /kàŋ kpɔ́ŋ/ 'a distant place'. In any case, apparently neither can be used as a noun, or topicalized.

15.3. A number of single words and regular compounds function as temporal adverbials. At least the following may also function as nouns and may be topicalized:

wɔ̀'ɛ́	'today'	sínà	'tomorrow'
kúnù	'yesterday'	kɔ́-sàŋ	'last year'
kúnù-kɔ̀'ɔ̀	'day before yesterday'		

Any of the foregoing, and also the following, may be used in sentence-initial position as a suspended topic. The following, however, are not used as nouns and are not topicalized:

sàáná	'soon'
sɔ́ɔ́ bɔ́ɔ̆	'some day, some time'
sɔ́ bɔ́ɔ̆	'perhaps'

The last two of the above are of particular interest in the light of some other Liberian languages and of many forms of tribal English. Some languages use a single phrase, literally meaning 'some day', to express both 'sometime' and 'perhaps'. It is common to hear, in English, 'sometimes' with the same two meanings. The two expressions above are presumably related, but are distinguished in pronunciation.

In still a different category are a few adverbs that may be used only in post-verbal position. Sequences of some of these are also found. First, /wè/ 'now, right away' has been recorded only by itself:

í ì mà wɛ̀	'do it right away'

Second, /wí/, referring to prior action, has been recorded by itself and also followed by another adverb, /kínɛ́í/, which seems to emphasize the immediacy of the prior action:

ná gbɔɔ̆ 'à kpà'à wí	'my farm had (already) gotten dry'
ná gbɔɔ̆ 'à kpà'à wí kínɛ́í	'my farm had just gotten dry'

Third, /wɛ́/ 'yet' (after a negative) or /nì/ 'long ago' may be used alone. The sequence /wɛ́ nì/ means 'ever' after a negative. Another morpheme, /gbà/, may perhaps be used by itself with some similar meaning, but it has been recorded only after /wɛ́/ and /wɛ́ nì/. These are illustrated in the following:

à má kùnɛ̀ wɛ́	'he hasn't waked up yet'
à táá'à nì núú	'he went there long ago'
ŋ́ má à mà wɛ́ gbà	'I haven't done it yet'
(with the implication 'since the current opportunity arose',	
though I may have done it on earlier occasions)	
ŋ́ má à mà wɛ́ nì (gbà)	'I haven't ever done it'

The above expressions were recorded, for the most part, incidentally to other aspects of elicitation, and were reviewed only briefly. It is most likely that the above description could be profitably expanded and refined, but there do not appear to be any unusual complications lurking in the shadows.

15.4. Duration of time is expressed by an appropriate phrase refer-
ring to a length of time or a number of periods of time, in adverbial
position. E.g., the final two-word phrase in each of the following:

sònáǎ tǒ'à kè-náà   'it kept on raining all night'
   lìfí gbù'ù
à'à sǒ kè té'é kpè'ɛ̀ŋ   'he worked all day'
à tǒ'à núú ká'ó sàkpá   'he stayed there for three months'

The different modifiers meaning 'all' for 'night' and 'day' appear to
be unique to these phrases.

15.5. Numerical frequentatives ('once', 'twice', etc.) consist of a
numeral by itself in adverbial position. Two other adverbs may be in-
cluded here: /'ó/ 'again, (not) any more', and /kpóŋ/ 'often'. E.g.,

à'à à mà lòndó   'he did it once'
ná'à à fɛ̀'ɛ̀ fè'á wò'ɛ́   'I saw him twice today'
í ì mà 'ó   'do it again'
í má à mà 'ó   'don't do it again, don't do it
                            any more'
à wé'è à mà 'ó   'he doesn't do it any more'
à'à à mà kpóŋ   'he did it often'

15.6. Adverbs of manner and ideophones can most conveniently be
treated together, although the categories are not coextensive. By way
of introduction to these forms, it should be noted that, in the rather
artificial process of learning as much as one can about a language
within a few weeks or months, it is virtually impossible to accumulate
a large amount of data in the relevant semantic areas. Even seemingly
elementary distinctions in the manner in which an action is performed
may be rather subtle, and do not lend themselves to elicitation. Is
something done, for example, merely 'quickly', or 'suddenly' (which
adds the element of unexpectedness)?[25] Probably in most languages of
the world, and certainly in most languages of Africa, expressions of
manner tend to be worded rather prosaically in the context of elicita-
tion and language learning; but in the drama of everyday conversation,
narrative, or argument, subtle distinctions and vivid ideophonic ex-
pressions are commonplace. In spite of the restricted Vai data availa-
ble, however, the outlines of some patterns seem to be visible, and are

very much worth pointing out.

First, some forms used as descriptive adverbs can safely be classed as ideophones on phonologic grounds. These are forms which consist of a consonant followed by a vowel which is, at least optionally, abnormally prolonged, with low tone. Such prolongation is indicated here by triple writing of the vowel symbol (cf. 2.2 above). One such ideophonic adverb was not actually recorded in a sentence, but came into a conversation in connection with the word for 'gun', /bhù/; the sound of a gun or a cannon is represented by the form /dhùùù/, which is undoubtedly used in sentences like other comparable forms. The forms recorded in sentences are:

cɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ : descriptive of liquid pouring in a single stream
wàààà : descriptive of rain falling in a brief shower
wùùù : descriptive of movement in mass or in confusion

These are illustrated in the following:

à bὲ sɛ́'í kɛ́-nà cɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀	'he is urinating, "cɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀"'
sòná 'à kὲ wàààà	'there was a brief shower'
ànú ná'à wùùù	'they came in droves'
à lóndà wùùù	'he rushed in precipitously'

Two other recorded forms seem rather similar, though they were not transcribed with abnormally long vowels. One is /bòlì/ 'slowly and carefully, which was heard after a predication of the type /à bὲ tááyɛ́-nà/ 'he is walking'. The other, cited in a sentence that was otherwise English, is /vàà̀/ (which I believe I recall hearing as /vàààà/, descriptive of (at least among other things) soldiers advancing fearlessly and inexorably. (This form has been cited as just possibly being the origin of the name /Váí/, with reference to the original movement of the ancestors of the present Vai people to the coast. The two words, of course, differ in both vowel length and tone; if they happen to be written the same in the syllabic writing system, that fact is of course irrelevant.)

Another category of forms that may be classed as ideophones are apparently not used as adverbs. They are rather qualificatives, recorded only predicatively in copulative predications (see 9.2 above, where these are illustrated). These forms are reduplications, with each half

of the word having two vowels, and with all low tones. There are also
some nouns with similar forms (cf. 7.6 above); it might be possible to
classify all such reduplicated nouns, irrespective of their tones, as
ideophonic nouns. The recorded qualificatives in question are:

  cɔbɔcɔbɔ ~ cɔìcɔì : descriptive of the ground or a road in a hope-
                                    lessly muddy condition
  cɔ̀kpɔ́cɔ̀kpɔ̀ : descriptive of the sliminess of "soup"
  tàmùtàmù   : descriptive of unsteady walking or staggering

It may also be possible to classify as ideophones, irrespective of
their phonologic shape, some forms which are used adverbially after a
very small set of verbs, or even after only one verb. Perhaps the best
recorded candidate for such a classification, the usage of which also
provides a striking example of the inherent impossibility of eliciting
ideophones systematically, is the form /sá/, descriptive of skill in
catching something; the following examples were volunteered:

  à'à à lɛ̀sì sá   'he caught it, "sá"'
  à'à à bì'à sá   "

Sports broadcasts, including play-by-play accounts of basketball games,
are now known in Liberia. Fr. Kandakai suggested that an excited an-
nouncer in the heat of a game, if he were broadcasting in Vai, might
very well use one of the above expressions; many an American announcer
would probably say, "What a fantastic catch!" You don't go around eli-
citing that sort of thing.

Another instance of the same type may be /sásá/ 'faster', recorded
in /mú ì bì sásá/ 'let's move faster', for which the context may be
walking, singing, working, or other activity. The sentence /mú ì bì/
means literally 'let's pick it up'.

Ideophones in various languages have often been described rather im-
pressionistically and subjectively. A formal definition or set of de-
finitions, such as attempted in the foregoing, is certainly preferable.
At the same time, ideophones do tend to have distinctive semantic cha-
racteristics, difficult as they may be to define precisely. Most of the
other Vai forms recorded as adverbs of manner seem to share something
of the vivid connotative force of ideophones. Not enough forms have
been recorded, however, to make it possible to define criteria for such

a classification. Certainly the form /wɛ́ɛ́/, prosaically defined as
'with determination', is much more graphic than that translation sug-
gests when used after an imperative construction such as /í ì mà/ 'do
it'; /í ì mà wɛ́ɛ́/ corresponds more closely to 'Give it all you've got!'
Other forms, all recorded in the context of 'walk', are:

lɛ̀ɛ̀ – lɛ̀ɛ̀lɛ̀ɛ̀	'quietly'
tóókéé	'quietly'
táámáá	'slowly and quietly'

One form is recorded both as a qualificative in a copulative predi-
cation, and adverbially. This is /gbà/ 'different, in a different or
strange way'. In addition, one form is recorded as a qualificative at-
tributive and also adverbially: /bɛ́'ɛ̀nà/ 'good, well'.

15.7. A handful of adverbs was recorded which do not appear to fall
into any of the categories described above, and which are here listed
as miscellany. These are:

kínɛ́í : 'just, barely' (illustrated in another context in 15.3)

lèŋ – lèŋ-lèŋ : 'a little bit, for a little while':
  í ŋ́ kɔ̀nɔ̀ lèŋ(-lèŋ)   'wait for me just a moment'

gbóŋ : 'very much':
  à kè'è bɛ̀ ńdà gbóŋ   'I want it very badly'

wákɛ̀ : 'necessarily':
  mùì tàà wákɛ̀   'we simply have to go'

Three forms with meanings in the general range of 'only' are recor-
ded only after nouns. They do not, however, appear to be noun modifi-
ers like qualificative attributives or numerals, because a noun with
low-high tones before one of these does not have the tonal alternant
low-low. It also seems likely that these forms have other uses, and
they are therefore included here:

bábáí :   àá mɔ̀ bábáí mɛ̀   'these are all (only, nothing but)
                           his people'

'ɔ́ : sé'èŋ tâŋ 'ɔ́ bɛ̀ ŋ́ bò'ò 'I have only two dollars'

'ɔ́béndɔ́ : à'à kɔ'ɔ́ 'ɔ́béndɔ́   'he bought nothing but rice'
      sàŋ

The last two of these forms are clearly related; /'ɔ́béndɔ́/ is said to
be simply more emphatic than /'ɔ́/ by itself.

15.8.   Three other forms may be described here, which are adverbial
in a sense, but which may perhaps better be called sentence-final par-
ticles.   The first of these is /wóé/ ([wéé]), which expresses courtesy,
concern, urgency, or warning, all of which find their expression in in-
tonation in English.   E.g.,

jɛ̀'ìmà wóé	'Goodnight!'
í kò'ò wóé	'I'm so sorry!'
mú bɛ̀ ná-nà wóé	'We're coming!'

The second of the above is typical of languages of Liberia and neigh-
boring areas.   The imperative /í kò'ò/ literally means 'Stop!'; the en-
tire expression is a tender exhortation to stop one's wincing, crying,
or grieving.   It may be used in any circumstance from one's stubbing a
toe to one's losing a loved one by death.   Unfortunately, the prevalent
English expression corresponding to such genuinely concerned expres-
sions in Liberian languages often sounds brutally callous to a newco-
mer: "Never mind, yah?"

     A second particle with very much the same range of meaning is less
common, perhaps archaic, but perhaps also more emphatic in some con-
texts.   It is /héé/, recorded in:

í ì mà wɛ̀ héé	'Do it right now!'

This form also appears very commonly in archaic writings using the Vai
syllabary, preceding the word /dhǎ/ 'friend'.   Toward the beginning of
a letter, practically every expression of greeting, well-wishing, and
tidbits of news may be followed by /héé dhǎ/.

     A third sentence-final particle is particularly common after the ex-
pression /í sɛ̀ɛ̀/ (pl. /wó sɛ̀ɛ̀/), which includes among other meanings
the ideas 'Congratulations!' and 'Thank you!' (see 16 below).   The par-
ticle is the syllable /ká/ repeated from two to four or more times.   In
the appropriate context, the translation given here would be proper:

í sɛ̀ɛ̀ kákákáká	'Thank you so very much!'

CHAPTER 16
SOME GREETINGS AND AMENITIES

16.1.   The material included here has relatively little to do with
the linguistic structure of Vai from a narrowly scientific point of
view. It is significant, however, in that it illustrates, perhaps more
adequately than almost any of the data included in earlier portions of
this grammar, the relationship between language and real life in the
Vai community. In addition, many of the expressions cited here have
close parallels in neighboring languages, including languages only very
distantly related to Vai; some expressions are typical of languages
throughout West Africa. Perhaps the inclusion of this material will
make some of the seemingly sterile allusions earlier in this grammar to
buying rice, stealing knives, and seeing someone in Jɔ̀ndú appear a bit
more realistic.

The following is a typical exchange of greetings in the morning, be-
tween two people who know each other. The second participant (B) ad-
dresses the first (A) by name. The English equivalents are or include
as literal translations as possible.

A. yá kùnɛ̀ éé?	'Have you awakened?'
B. ɛ̀ɛ̀. Kɔ̀ŋ-káì, yá kùnɛ̀ éé?	'Yes. Kɔ̀ŋ-káì, have you awakened?'
A. ɛ̀ɛ̀.	'Yes.'
B. í kɪ̃́'à kámà.	'How did you sleep?'
A. kàsé bé'è Kàmbá máì.	'There's no fault with God.
ŋ́ kɪ̃́'à bɛ́'ɛ̀nà.	I slept well.'

The following is a typical exchange later in the day; A has arrived
from somewhere else at B's home, farm, or place of work.

A. í bɛ̀ nú?	'Are you there?'
B. ɛ̀ɛ̀. Mɔ̀mɔ́'ù, yá nà?	'Yes. Mɔ̀mɔ́'ù, have you come?'
A. ɛ̀ɛ̀.	'Yes.'
B. mbê-kò bɛ̀ nɪ̂ɛ̀?	'What news is there here?'

A. kàsé bé'è Kàmbá máì.   'There's no fault with God.'

B. yá mùsú bè nú?   'Is your wife there?'

A. ɛ̀ɛ̀. à bè nú.   'Yes, she's there.'

B. à kpò'ó 'ɔ̀ (bè kámà).   'The inside of her skin (is how?)'

                                 (i.e., 'how is she?')

A. kàsé bé'è Kàmbá máì.   'There's no fault with God.'

Asking merely whether someone is 'there' is a genuine expression of
concern, comparable to our asking 'How are you?' or 'How's your wife?'.
This may be followed by an inquiry as to how one is, but to make such
an inquiry as the first reference to a person is not very courteous; it
has something of the implication that the inquirer expects the other
person to be sick.

Asking about 'news' always implies bad news. The Vai response sug-
gests that if there is any bad news, it is not God's fault. (In many
other languages, the response is 'there is no news here', even though
there may be a lot of good news, or 'there is no bad news here'. Ab-
solving God of blame is, however, a more widespread response to a ques-
tion about one's health.) Instead of the Vai question /mbê-kò bè nɛ̂ɛ̀/
cited above, one may ask /mbê-kò tè'é'à nɛ̂ɛ̀/ 'What has transpired here?'
With a personal subject, the verb /^{R}tè'é/ means 'spend the day'. The
noun /kó/ in the compound /mbê-kò/ is not specifically 'news', but
'thing (immaterial)', something that can happen.

16.2. If a speaker does not know the name of someone who greets
him, or if he feels it inappropriate to use the personal name (as might
be true in speaking to an elder), terms of address like the following
are available:

ŋ́ fǎ   'my father' (to an older man)

ŋ́ bâ   'my mother' (to an older woman)

ná léŋ   'my child' (to someone considerably younger'

ŋ́ líámɔ́   'my friend' (to a peer or someone somewhat younger)

ŋ́ dhǎ   'my good friend' (to a peer or someone somewhat younger,
             somewhat more intimate than the preceding, and used
             mostly by older people)

Similarly, of course, one may inquire about any member of someone's
family, or about someone else by name. Some of the terms that may be

substituted for /yá mùsú/ 'your wife' in exchanges such as that given above are:

yá kàí	'your husband'	yá léŋ	'your child'
í fǎ	'your father'	yá léŋ nú	'your children'
í bâ	'your mother'	í nyɔ̀mɔ́	'your brother/sister'

16.3. An expression of leave-taking, addressed to one person, is /í kàfáí/ 'Excuse me'; to more than person, the corresponding expression is /wó kàfáí/. Another expression that may be used is /ná'à tàà/, literally 'I have gone.' To any of these, the response is /ɛ̀ɛ́/.

An evening farewell exchange may be as follows:

A.	jὲ'ìmà wóé. - í jὲ'ìmà.	'(Good) evening.'
B.	ɛ̀ɛ́. í jὲ'ìmà.	'Yes, good evening to you.'
A.	Kàmbá ì mú kì bέ'ὲ.	'May God let us sleep well.'
B.	ɛ̀ɛ́.	'Yes.'

The causative transitive usage of the verb /^{R}kǐ/ 'sleep' in the above is unusual.

16.4. A few other amenities are worthy of note. If someone accidentally bumps into another person, or otherwise causes him minor discomfort or inconvenience, the offender says /í lí mù/. We might say 'it was my fault' in English; the Vai expression means essentially 'it is your innocence.' A common equivalent would, of course, be 'Sorry!'

An expression of condolence which might also be translated as 'Sorry!', however, is /í kò'ò wóé/; see 15.8 above.

The expression /í sὲɛ́/ (also noted in 15.8 above; it is /wó sὲɛ́/ to more than one person) is paralleled by phonetically similar expressions in many other Liberian languages. The standard equivalent in Liberian tribal English is 'Thank you!' This has given rise to unfortunate misunderstandings among expatriates, who often get the impression at first that they are being thanked for coming to a place, for working, when a child is born, and on other occasions. Actually, the range of meaning can perhaps best be summed up by the colloquial English 'Nice going!' The expression is used for welcome and congratulations, and in the case of Vai only marginally to express gratitude. The response is /ɛ̀ɛ́/.

Gratitude is more explicitly expressed by /í bá'íkà/ to one person,

or /wó bá'íkà/ to more than one. The pronoun may optionally be omit-
ted, and /bá'íkà/ may then be repeated, usually only once: /bá'íkà,
bá'íkà/. (The form is ultimately of Arabic origin, and has spread into
a great many West African languages.) Again the response is /ɛ́ɛ̀/,
which is not so much specifically 'yes' as merely an acknowledgement of
something pleasant that has been said.

   In conclusion:

ŋ́ kùŋ Váí-wò'ò fɔ́'à lèŋ-lèŋ 'I can speak Vai just a little'

NOTES

[1]P. E. H. Hair (1968) cites the 1963 Sierra Leone census for the figure "about 8,000." His estimate of "probably about 50,000 in Liberia" is hardly to be preferred over the 1962 Liberian census figure, 28,898 (Bureau of Statistics, Office of National Planning, 1964).

[2]Since the beginning of its history as a separate language, Vai appears to have undergone a remarkable modification of its consonant system as a result of acquiring foreign lexical items. Neither the nature nor the amount of this acquisition is particularly unusual, but only the extent to which foreign sounds were recognized and retained. Vai cannot otherwise be said to have been strongly "influenced" or in any sense "hybridized" by other languages; even the phonological modification is relatively superficial and, of course, does not make Vai any less a Northern Mande language. Although innovations in the Vai consonant phonology appear in general to post-date the separation of Vai and Kono, there must surely have been earlier shared lexical acquisitions. My estimate of the time depth of the separation of Vai-Kono from Mandekan is not in the order of 500 years, a figure erroneously and mysteriously attributed to me by Hair (1968), but more like 1700 years.

[3]Klingenheben left a file of some 3,500 vocabulary cards, about 1,500 Vai-German and 2,000 German-Vai, which are said to include tone marking. Desirable as it might be to examine and possibly to publish an edited version of that file, it has proven simpler, in the course of the present study, to compile a Vai-English file of comparable dimensions which, with an English-Vai counterpart, is being prepared for separate publication.

[4]In his High School days in the early 1930's, Fr. Kandakai was a student of the late Richard W. Heydorn, whom he remembers rather fondly. His judgment of Heydorn's Vai pronunciation at the time is less than favorable, but he recalls Heydorn's delight and persistence in ferreting out obscure lexical items.

[145]

[5]Verb stems such as /[R]wú'ì/ are not actual citation forms, but are the appropriate forms for lexical entries; "[R]" may be thought of as referring to "root." Most verb stems tend to be cited with low tone throughout, reflecting the grammatical tone of the imperative. Contrastive lexical tones with verb stems appear regularly only before certain suffixes, as in the future. Writing these lexical tones but preposing the "[R]" thus provides the tonal information that is needed, yet serves as a consistent reminder that such forms may be cited with other tones by applying regular rules. In the forms cited here and throughout this study, an intervocalic apostrophe indicates the optional inclusion or omission of an intervocalic [l], discussed in 1.8.

[6]Evidence from Vai syllabic writing (provided by Mrs. Gail Stewart, personal communication) tends to confirm the conclusions drawn here. Prior to 1900, nasal-oral sequences were not distinguished from oral stops in the syllabary. There are now special symbols for nasal-oral sequences followed by vowels: /mba, mbe, nda, ŋge/ etc.; but there is considerable inconsistency in the transcription of these sequences. A form such as /bàŋgú'ù/, cited above, may be written alternatively with the symbols for *ba-ŋgu-lu, ba-ŋ-gu-lu,   ba-ŋ-ŋgu-lu.* There is no consistent correlation with the identification of a particular form as a single morpheme or a compound.

[7]This may actually go to the ludicrous extreme represented by the following entirely conceivable exchange between a learner and a native speaker of Vai (assuming that the learner imitates accurately, and with no reflection on the attentiveness or integrity of the language helper):

    Learner: What do you call a 'road'?
    Helper: [kîa].
    Learner: [kîa]. Is that right?
    Helper: That's right: [kílà].
    Learner: Oh, I didn't notice that [l]. It's [kílà].
    Helper: That's right: [kîa].

In principle, there is nothing particularly unusual about this, but it is admittedly much more conspicuous in Vai than it appears to be in most other languages.

[8]I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Gail Stewart, the outstanding authority on the Vai syllabary, for her having pointed out to me this most significant detail in the phonology of Vai. Since Fr. Kandakai commonly uses [l] for initial /l/, I would not otherwise have been aware of the potential contrast. This highly restricted occurrence of morpheme-initial [l] contrasting with what is here interpreted as /l/ may seem unusual, but it is fully confirmed in Kono, in which the inherited PNM *l has completely (and apparently quite independently) disappeared, so that cognates of two of the most common Vai morphemes in question appear as mere vowels, /ɔ̀/ 'inside' and /à/ (associative).

[9]The rationale for Koelle's use of *r* is not entirely clear. If the sound was indeed a lateral resonant in his day, his presumably German-accented English (for which there are other evidences) hardly seems to justify a transcription other than *l*. Perhaps over-eagerly, Fr. Kandakai reports recalling old people, in his childhood, pronouncing such words with an alveolar tap; his competence in this respect is not in question, since he is acquainted with "Mandingo" (i.e., Mandekan, and especially Maninka) pronunciations of Vai, which would understandably use [r] for [l]. On the other hand, other early transcriptions of some Vai vocabulary use *l*. In any case, the sound was apparently [l] by the time it began to disappear. And one can hardly resist citing, in connection with the fate of the Vai intervocalic lateral, the words of Edna St. Vincent Millay after her beloved mother's death (and called to my attention by Mrs. Gail Stewart), "The presence of that absence is everywhere!"

[10]As noted previously, the Vai syllabary had no special symbols for nasal-oral sequences followed by vowels until 1900. The relevant phonemic contrasts, however restricted, had probably arisen well before that time, and (typically) were recognized a little belatedly. It may also be noted that Klingenheben (1926?) includes not only the symbols for such sequences, but also symbols that had apparently been invented solely for the transcription of English words with initial consonants such as [š] and [θ], which I have not recorded even in recently acquired Vai words. The fact remains that developments in the syllabary reflect some valid native reactions to historical developments in Vai phonology.

[11]In very recent years, it seems that the majority of African languages that have been investigated for the first time happen to have terraced-level tone systems. One may, indeed, get the impression that earlier investigators frequently overlooked "downdrift," to say nothing of "downstep" (cf. Welmers 1973, p. 93). Actually, it is only an accident of history that many of the languages for which earlier responsible tonal analyses are available happened to have discrete-level systems, while many of those more recently studied happen to have terraced-level systems. The pitch sequences in the illustrative sentences in this chapter are in stunning contrast with comparable sentences in a terraced-level language. Less than two weeks before these sentences were transcribed, some sentences were heard and transcribed in Kisi, with about the same number of low tones preceding high tones. In Kisi, each high tone after a low was at least one musical step lower than the last high tone before it. The tones of Vai are a reminder that one should not assume that downdrift is the norm in tone languages. It is not likely, to be sure, that anyone speaks in such a mechanical way that *every high tone in a sentence has precisely the same frequency;* the phrase applied to Vai here, no *appreciable* downdrift,' was deliberately so worded. The fact remains that the pitches of alternating low and high tones in Vai are vastly different from those in actual terraced-level languages such as Kisi, Igbo, or Efik -- or, as discovered more recently, Kono!

[12]The Vai syllabary has a single symbol for this syllabic nasal and for the word-final nasal, irrespective of its phonetic realization. In his efforts to write in an alphabetic transcription, F. Kandakai, who has had some training in phonetics, very commonly wrote ŋ irrespective of the following consonant, before this orthographic convention was decided on. While this may in part reflect his acquaintance with the syllabary, it is also true that, for speakers of Vai who are literate in English, ŋ is a "new" or "unusual" symbol, and is admirably suited to being used for a syllabic nasal unspecified as to articulatory position. In fact, even word-final /ŋ/ is obligatorily specified as velar only if no consonant follows.

[13]It must not be taken for granted that citation forms have declarative intonation. In some other Mande languages (Mano, for example),

citation forms are normally given in interrogative intonation.

[14]It did not seem particularly meritorious to devote time in Liberia, or space here, to the equivalents of such improbable curiosities as 'those two big old white broken-down wooden houses of theirs.'

[15]The word "soup" as commonly used in Liberia, as the equivalent of some word in every indigenous language, refers to any preparation served on or with rice, most commonly using palm oil. The Vai people seem to have a particular fondness for "slimy" preparations containing okra, sweet potato greens, the scrapings of the inside of cocoa pods, or other ingredients giving the same effect. Americans may dislike the consistency, but *de gustibus non disputandum est.*

[16]This usage comes as close as anything in Vai to warrant the use of the term "aorist." Heydorn (1971 [1934]) applies the term to this construction, but unfortunately also to identificative and copulative predications which are not verbal at all (cf. 9 above); he further compounds the confusion by referring to the identificative particle and the copula in terms of *"the verb 'to be.'"*

[17]A closely similar construction is used in Kpelle, in which the verb meaning 'stay, continue' is even more obviously involved.

[18]I am quite aware that a number of linguists are currently using the word "focus" for what has often been, and is here, called "topicalization," and apply the latter term to a somewhat different grammatical phenomenon. I prefer to reserve the word "focus" for a still different phenomenon found in the syntax of Malayo-Polynesian languages, for which I believe I was the first to suggest the term (which has been used in publications) in an oral discussion of Ilocano syntax about 1952.

[19]Perhaps this is a good place to register a personal protest against the linguistic chauvinism of the ridiculous label "WH questions." The term is, of course, based on the spelling of most question words in English orthography, although most of them are pronounced with initial /hw/ or /w/, depending on one's dialect, and some with initial /h/. I consider completely unjustifiable and utterly reprehensible the implicit assumption that linguistics can be discussed only in English.

In spoken English, moreover, "WH" takes longer to say than "question word!" The abbreviation fad could be promoted even better by acknowledging the existence of at least a few other languages and using "Q."

[20]This is somewhat different from the situation in Kpelle (a Southwestern Mande language), in which all topicalized complements are recapitulated by an appropriate form with a neutral meaning (see Welmers 1973, pp. 318-21).

[21]It is possible that a relative construction may also function as a possessor, but no effort was made to elicit equivalents of expressions like 'the dog belonging to the man who came' (the man who came's dog'?).

[22]This, roughly the equivalent of something like 'as for the man who did it, ...', is what is sometimes referred to as topicalization. Having reserved the term "focus" for a Malayo-Polynesian phenomenon (note 18 above), and having used "topicalization" as described in 13.1-3, I clearly need another term here, and find "suspended topic" adequate.

[23]The verb /^{R}súmá/ might also be translated 'weigh', but that meaning would be inappropriate in this case, since no scale was available. The finny (and toothy) friend was 46" long, and delicious.

[24]An exactly comparable phrase in Kpelle, /ǹya ɓé/, the third person singular independent pronoun followed by the identifier, has the same function.

[25]A fried chicken emporium in Monrovia displays the delightful, if improbable, motto: "SUDDEN SERVICE!"

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